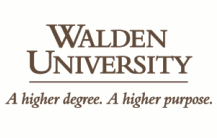

2017

Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development Benefits for Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Francene Garrett

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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2017

Abstract

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by

Francene R. Garrett

MA, Nova Southeastern University, 2007

BS, Clayton State University, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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January 2017

Abstract

There is a correlation between the professional development that teachers receive and student academic success. It has been shown that knowledgeable teachers have a profound impact on student achievement. Many general and special educators enter the field of education and are placed to teach in inclusive environments with little to no professional development related to inclusion. This placement often adversely impacts the success of students with disabilities on state tests. However, there is limited information on the types of professional development necessary for teaching in inclusion. Guided by Bandura's social cognitive theory, this study explored teachers' perceptions of the types of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusion. The research questions examined participants' attitudes and perceptions toward professional development needs, professional development experiences, and instructional activities used in inclusion. A qualitative case study approach was used to purposefully select 5 general and 5 special education teachers who taught in inclusion classrooms. Data for the study were collected through individual interviews, which were recorded and transcribed, then analyzed and coded for themes. Teachers' perceptions showed there was insufficient training for new teachers, a need for ample planning time in their professional development routine, and a need to implement models of coteaching as described by Friend (2009). The potential for positive social change includes improved inclusion-based professional development for all teachers, which may increase the likelihood of student academic success.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my daughter, McKenzie Ave' Garrett, who has inspired me to go above and beyond in all facets of life. Without the joy, zeal, and excitement that you possess McKenzie, I would not have the drive and determination to accomplish any goal worth striving for in my life. You are the closest manifestation of pure love on this side of Heaven. I also dedicated this body of work to the memory of my cousin who left us too soon, Jamie L. Jenkins. Your love and unnatural kindness lives on in my heart. I feel your presence daily. Respect.

Acknowledgments

I would like to personally salute The Almighty, my parents, sister, friends and family for their support during this journey. There have been many peaks and valleys along the way, but your efforts served as much needed encouragement at every turn. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to the faculty and staff at Walden University, my mentor, editors, and my chair and committee members. Thank you for unwavering support and push past the finish line. This would not have been possible without your guidance.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Throughout the history of education in the United States, students with disabilities were excluded from public education until the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (1976; Marling, 2013). This act required all children to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE), allowing students with disabilities to be educated with their peers. Prior to passage and implementation of this law, special education programs in public schools were available for students with disabilities; however, the students in the programs were concerns regarding the programs (Marling, 2013). This situation changed with the passage of PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which mandated that students with disabilities be provided with a free and public education (FAPE) in their LRE (Marling, 2013).

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms has been a goal of educational reformists for many years (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Guckert, Thompson, & Weiss, 2013). Following the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2009, nearly all students with disabilities who attend public school began to spend at least part of their day being educated with children without disabilities in the general education classroom (IDEA, 2009). The general education classroom is where students receive instruction and participate in activities throughout the school day, which exposes all learners to content classes such as reading, math, science, and social studies, as well as career and character building traits that are acquired in secondary education (McLaughlin, 2010). Although inclusion can be seen as an attitude or belief system that implies that everyone belongs and is accepted, many feel that it is a key component in the success of students with and without disabilities in the

learning environment (Kosko & Wilkins, 2009). Although some controversy exists, most educators support the implementation of inclusive classrooms (McLaughlin, 2010).

Federal law PL 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1976) governs the education of children with disabilities. Although the term inclusion is not contained in the law, it requires that significant efforts be made to educate students with special needs in their LRE (IDEA, 2004)

> The LRE mandate requires that students with disabilities receive their education in the general education classroom to the maximum extent appropriate with necessary supports and services, or when the general education setting is not appropriate, in the setting with the least amount of segregation from their nondisabled peers (IDEA, 2004).

The implementation of this mandate required general education and special education teachers to be prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities who receive instruction in the general education classroom (Allison, 2010).

General education teachers often encounter challenges in implementing inclusive classrooms because it can be difficult and complex to meet the needs of such demanding and diverse environments (MacCarthy, 2010). Some of these challenges for teachers are because of deficits in skill levels, lack of necessary time available for the increase in instructional planning, and not being accustomed or prepared to implement individualized and small group instruction within a large group (MacCarthy, 2010). Many of these problems exist in all classroom environments but may cause additional concerns when they arise in inclusive settings (Allison, 2010). Special education and general education teachers have reported that an increase in paperwork, lack of financial

compensation, lack of adequate funding for special education programs, and required time for additional training and outreach for special and general education teachers are barriers to inclusion (MacCarthy, 2010).

The success of inclusion requires that special education teachers and general education teachers are prepared to work with students with disabilities, (Woolfson & Brady, 2009). Dieker and Hines (2013) drew from the research to conclude that the benefits of inclusion across grade levels far outweigh the difficulties inclusion presents. For example, they believed

> for students with disabilities, inclusion: facilitates more appropriate social behavior because of higher expectations in the general education classroom; promotes levels of achievement higher or at least as high as those achieved in self-contained classrooms; offers a wide circle of support, including social support from classmates without disabilities; and improves the ability of students and teachers to adapt to different teaching and learning styles. The authors further contend that general education students also benefit from inclusion. For these students, inclusion has the potential to: offer the advantage of having an extra teacher or aide to help them with the development of their own skills; leads to greater acceptance of students with disabilities; facilitates understanding that students with disabilities are not always easily identified; and promotes better understanding of the similarities among students with and without disabilities (p. 156).

Because of these beneficial aspects of inclusion for all learners, it is important to ensure that inclusion programs are fully and adequately operational in schools. Another

study regarding the perceptions of middle school students, parents, and teachers indicated there is a shared belief that middle level students with mild disabilities included in the general classroom experienced (a) increased self-confidence, (b) camaraderie, (c) support of the teachers, and (d) higher expectations. The study also indicated that these students avoided low self-esteem that can result from placement in a special education setting (Dieker & Hines, 2013).

Current barriers to inclusion generally fall into three categories: organizational, attitudinal, and knowledge (Dieker & Hines, 2013). Organizational barriers are related to the differences in ways schools and classes are taught, staffed, and managed. Scheduling the amount of time needed for collaborative planning, especially at the middle and secondary levels where a coteacher may be working with as many as six different teachers during the course of the school day, is another difficulty. Attitudinal barriers, especially among teachers, have been explored as inclusive practices have been implemented. The primary findings are that teachers agree in principle with the goals of inclusion, but many do not feel prepared to work in inclusive settings (Dieker & Hines, 2013). In addition, collaboration calls for a shift in control and the sharing of a learning environment rather than having individual space, both concepts foreign to the traditionally trained teacher. Also, accepting new ideas about teaching, learning, and learning styles that is called for may not be always embraced by teachers (Mastropieri et al., 2013). Both general and special educators feel that knowledge barriers also exist in inclusive classrooms. In many cases, general educators do not feel that they have received the necessary training for working with students with special needs (Dieker & Hines, 2013). Conversely, special educators may be at a disadvantage in middle level

classes if they are not content experts and may thus be placed in more of a consultant's role (Dieker & Hines, 2013).

Problem Statement

A problem exists at a local middle school regarding professional development and the efforts to refine and enhance teacher performance levels in inclusive environments. That problem, specifically, is that many general and special education teachers have a low sense of self-efficacy for teaching students in inclusive classroom environments. The problem impacts student achievement because when teachers lack the content knowledge and understanding of how to effectively expand their own abilities they cannot meet the needs of students. Each year middle school students take an end of grade assessment to determine performance levels and mastery of content. The students can score as Beginning Learners, Developing Learners, Proficient Learners, and Distinguished Learners. In 2014-2015, 79% of students with disabilities at the study site scored at the beginning learner level on the end of grade assessment in English language arts, 74.6% of students with disabilities scored as beginner learners in mathematics, while 84.1% of students with disabilities scored as beginning learners in science, and 74.2 % of students with disabilities scored at the beginning learner level in social studies. It is unknown however, if teacher perception towards the professional development for inclusion can impact instructional practice. Teachers' perception towards professional development may play an important role in how teachers teach, thus effecting student achievement and teacher effectiveness (DuFour, R., DuFour, R., & Eaker, Many, 2010).

Professional development has often been stifled or canceled (Fuchs, 2010). Training opportunities have focused on isolated strategy-based designs rather than

collaborative activities providing both strategy and content development (Fuchs, 2010). Although there are many and varied formats for professional development activities, without a critical analysis of the participants, the educational environment will not see meaningful change (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011). Kauffman and Hallahan (2011) questioned the lack of substantial empirical evidence about what teachers learn and do not learn in professional development activities. In middle school, many general education teachers struggle to implement effective inclusion programs for students in inclusive classrooms (Dyal, Carpenter, & Wright, 2009). In any given classroom, there will be students performing significantly below or above grade level and students who are somewhere in between (Steffes, 2010). The general education teacher is challenged to educate students at all skill levels while maintaining an adequate teaching pace to meet the required state standards (Rock & Bateman, 2009; Elbaum, 2013). Factors such as class size and lack of special education professional development and training have been identified as possible barriers for inclusion programs (Skinner, 2009). For inclusion to be successful there is a need for professional development. Further, the literature revealed additional barriers to successful inclusion programs such as low student expectations, restricted curriculum foci, and negative student attributes resulting from school failure (Stocks, 2010). Professional development is crucial in providing continual updates on effective teaching practices, tools and technology, and providing support in areas of need or interest (Hunzicker, 2011). Current professional development focused on effective teaching and learning is at the cornerstone of any effectually implemented inclusion programs that lead to a complete and systematic change in educating students (Stocks, 2010). Professional development approached through a workshop style presentation has

proven ineffective in meeting the needs of teachers (Hunzincker, 2011). Massive amounts of information combined with little time for application and continued practice leave a great deal to be desired of traditional workshop professional development (Hunzicker, 2011). Effective professional development is grounded in research-based practices, sustained over time, has collective faculty participation, and is content focused on curricular and teacher needs (Lydon & King, 2009). The problem is that many general and special education teachers have a low sense of self-efficacy for teaching students in inclusive classroom environments.

Relevance of the Study

The strength and effectiveness of the public education system may be dependent on effective training and continuous professional development of teachers (Szypula, 2009). Traditional approaches to teacher training and development have proven ineffective to meet the unique and changing needs of general education teachers (Schleicher, 2011). Berry (2010) reported that early career general education teachers have slightly positive perceptions of inclusion but experienced uneasiness and discomfort because they sensed that they lacked knowledge and skills to understand the difference between learning disabilities, emotional-behavioral disabilities, and social cognitive disabilities. Additionally, teachers who received in-service training and materials to use with students with disabilities felt significantly more successful than those who did not (Berry, 2010). The professional development sessions that the teachers engaged in increased their skills in modifying instruction for students with disabilities. Moreover, educators have expressed concerns towards inclusion, stating that there is insufficient support and training, as well as time to collaborate with others in meeting the challenges

of students with disabilities to effectively implement and create appropriate instructional accommodations (Salend, 2011). In response, this study explored the types of professional development that teachers find beneficial when teaching in inclusion classrooms. In this study, I explored middle school teacher perceptions of professional development to support their work in inclusion classrooms. This study contributed to the existing literature and research on inclusionary teaching practices by identifying the specific professional development needs of general and special education teachers who teach in inclusive environments.

Training Special and General Education Instructors

Historically, the skills of special education teachers and general education teachers have been developed separately due to the traditional courses of study used in teacher preparation programs (Hargrove, 2010). For instance, special education and general education require two unique professional development training delivery systems in higher education training programs. Even though inclusion is more frequently practiced than in the past, little training and research have been devoted to helping professional educators and school administrators handle these new challenges (Alexander, 2014). The limited training and support for educators can affect the way in which students with disabilities are educated and perceived in the general population at the local school (Mastin, 2010). Although states have different general education teacher credential requirements, there is a need for specific specialized education courses for all teachers to meet special education students' needs (Mastin, 2010). It is generally agreed that for inclusion to be considered effective, school personnel and administration should be receptive to not only the concept of inclusion but also to the implementation

(Shafiuddin, 2010). Nevertheless, leaders in college preparation education programs have stated concerns about incorporating comprehensive special education courses into teacher training in programs because the field of special education is immense (Hargrove, 2010).

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the types of professional development needed to support successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom at the middle school level. The study site, which was located in a Southern state in the United States, consisted of one middle school with a population of 1,000 students in Grades 6, 7tand 8 and 50 teachers in a school district with one middle school and one high school. Seventeen of the teachers teach special education classes. The 10 participants for this study included five general education teachers and five special education teachers who teach or have experience in teaching in inclusive classrooms. The research method will be discussed in detail in Section 3.

Research Questions

The guiding research question addressed in this study was:

RQ: What types of professional development do general and special education teachers need when teaching in inclusive environments?

There were sub questions used were.

SQ1: What are the professional development needs identified by general education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

SQ2: What are the professional development needs identified by special education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

SQ3: How might professional development be used to improve the current inclusion programs?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate special education and general education teachers' perceptions of the types of professional development that would be beneficial for teaching in inclusive environments. Although there has been research on negative and positive perceptions and attitudes that educators have towards inclusion, there is little research that documents the lived experiences of general and special education teachers on the types of professional development that they perceive to be beneficial when teaching in inclusion settings (Allison, 2011; Berry 2010). This study was expected to fill the literature gap in the practices of inclusion and in understanding the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding how professional development for general education teachers and special education teachers may be improved.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bandura's (1993) social cognitive theory. In the social cognitive theory, Bandura (1993) hypothesized that people's beliefs about their capabilities produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1997). The essence of Bandura's social cognitive theory also focuses on the idea that a person's level of knowledge and beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1993). He also believed that people's motivation would be stronger if they were self-aware of their progress and thought that their goals are achievable. The

manner in which people perceive themselves and their abilities influence the goals they set and how they attempt to complete them. Therefore, if people feel they are successful, they are more likely to be successful. Furthermore, they are less likely to retreat when facing challenging situations. Thus, teachers' perceptions about the professional development they have received may be determined by their experiences in past professional development trainings. Bandura's concept of self-perception pertained to this study because the goal of this study was to understand the lived experiences of teachers in relation to the professional development they received to teach in an inclusive classroom.

Bandura's social cognitive theory has been widely used in studies of human behavior and the consequences that occur from their chosen actions (Woodcock & Reupert, 2011). Although social cognitive theory reflects self-perception, researchers (Durgunoglu, & Hughes, 2010; Woodcock & Reuport, 2011) affirmed that teachers with high efficacy beliefs produce stronger student achievement than teachers with lower efficacy beliefs. Therefore, providing professional development to enhance practices used in inclusion settings is essential to ensure meaningful and appropriate educational experiences for students with disabilities (Braden, Haui, White, &, Elliot, 2005). Based on Bandura's social cognitive theory, this study explored the types of professional development that general education and special education teachers perceive to be beneficial when teaching in inclusive classrooms.

In addition to Bandura's social cognitive theory, the conceptual framework for this study was also supported by current research studies conducted by Mastin (2010). The study noted that inclusion can be successful when both the general education teacher

and the special education teacher have a clear and concise understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The conceptual framework was also supported by studies conducted by Monahan, Marion, and Miller (2001), Murawski & Deiker (2008), and Allison (2011), which identified perceived feelings of pride, inadequacy, frustration, and lack of support as reasons why educators like or dislike inclusion.

In summary, Bandura's social cognitive theory posited that perceptions affect a person's ideas and beliefs. Bandura noted that positive perceptions lead to positive cognitive responses which lead to positive performance by individuals. Teachers' perceptions of their professional development may have an impact on their performance. Therefore, Bandura's theory and other current research studies support the conceptual framework for this study because people develop attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about a situation based on their lived experiences.

Operational Definitions

The operational terms and definitions for this study provide knowledge and details of essential expressions addressed in this study. The terminology is frequently utilized within educational environments that practice inclusion.

Collaborative Classroom: Classroom in which there is both a general education teacher and a regular education teacher who work together to teach all students. (Banerjee, 2012)

Coteaching: "Two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to adverse or blended groups of students in a single physical space" (Cook & Friend, 1995, p.2).

Full inclusion: The practice of including all students, regardless of handicapping condition or severity, in a regular classroom/program full time. All services must be taken to the child in that setting (Wisconsin Education E Association Council, 2009).

Inclusion: Educating each child to the maximum extent appropriate regardless of disability in the school and classroom the child would normally attend (Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2009). Inclusion involves bringing the support services to the child rather than moving the child to the services. Additionally, inclusion services requires that the child will benefit from being in the class environment rather than having to keep up with the other students academically (Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2009).

Individualized education plan (IEP): A written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting in which the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance along with how the disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum are discussed (Sec.200.320 of the Individualized Education Act (2004)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Law guaranteeing services to children with disabilities within the United States (IDEA, 2004).

Least restrictive environment (LRE): A student's right to be educated in the setting most like the educational setting for nondisabled peers and in which the student can be successful if appropriate support is provided (IDEA, 2004).

Mainstreaming: The selective placement of special education students in one or more "regular" education classes. Proponents of mainstreaming generally assume that a student must "earn" his or her opportunity to be placed in regular classes by

demonstrating an ability to "keep up" with the work assigned by the regular classroom teacher (Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2009). This concept is closely linked to traditional forms of special education service delivery (Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2009).

Middle school: A school that serves pre-adolescent and young adolescent students between Grades 5 and 9, with most in the Grade 6-8 range. Middle schools in the upper grade range (7-9) are sometimes referred to as junior high schools. (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Professional development: The range of formal and informal processes and activities that teachers engage in both inside and outside of the school, in order to improve their teaching knowledge and skills (Mertens, Flowers, Anfara., & Caskey, 2010).

Self-efficacy: A character trait explaining how people's preconceptions regarding their abilities to perform can affect their actual performance in a variety of contexts. (Bandura, 1994).

Special education: As defined in the IDEA, Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, (IDEA, 2004).

Scope, Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

The scope of the study involved general and special education teachers in one southern middle school who teach in inclusion classrooms in a middle school setting and who experience professional development. The study site was selected because a critical analysis of the professional development practices used at the study site was needed to

determine its effectiveness, the participants were accessible, there was interest in understanding more about effective professional development for inclusion teachers, and there was interest in assisting the teachers to improve the existing professional development program.

Delimitations

Delimitations are used to "narrow the scope of a study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 148). This study was confined to interviewing and collecting data from teachers in a southern state in one rural public middle school. The study consisted of interview questions regarding inclusion and professional development. Participants were certified teachers and worked at the study site. No data was collected from administrators, paraprofessionals, or other stakeholders. Results were collected and analyzed to include teacher perceptions regarding the types of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusion environments.

Limitations

This study was limited to one middle school in a district in a Southern state. This study is further limited to teachers who serve students in Grades 6, 7, and 8 with disabilities in inclusive classrooms and does not include paraprofessionals, media specialists, or counselors. The study only revealed the perceptions of the teachers who take part in the study and did not represent all of the teachers within the study site. The study was also limited to the perceptions of middle school teachers. Generalizations were not be made from the results of the study. Participating general and special education teachers may be afraid to be open and honest about their views on all aspects of professional development. There were a limited number of males who worked in the

teaching population at the study site; therefore, a diverse sample population in relation to gender would not be represented in the population.

Assumptions

I assumed that participants in the study were representative of other general and special education teachers within this rural area in the South. I also assumed that the questions were not biased and are reliable. Additionally, I assumed that the teachers had taught or currently taught in inclusive classrooms. Inclusive classrooms were identified as a classroom with a student with disabilities who spends at least some portion of the school day in the inclusive classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Finally, I assumed that the teachers who take part in the study understand the questions that are asked during the interview and provide honest answers that represent their perceptions and beliefs.

Significance of the Study

The increase in the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms requires collaboration among staff members to educate all students, which requires well-prepared regular education and special education teachers (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2001). Professional development may be a way to increase the skills of teachers to prepare them to teach in inclusive classrooms at the study site. The purpose of the study was to investigate the types of professional development that general education and special education teachers perceive to be beneficial when teaching in inclusive environments. The results of this study uncovered goals, knowledge, and other insights that may reveal the types of professional development opportunities to benefit teachers who work in inclusive classrooms. This exploration was also done in an effort to

identify the strategies that can be used to improve teaching skills in inclusive classrooms to support the achievement of students.

The results of this study affected teachers' perceptions about professional development by making them a valuable part of the process of determining what they need to be successful. Teachers may be able to glean the effective attributes of professional development that positively impact teachers' preparation for success in instructional practices in the inclusive environment (Lee, 2013). This study was also expected to provide information regarding what types of professional development would be most beneficial to teachers in inclusive classrooms at the study site as well as those that teachers have found less effective for working in inclusive classrooms. The results of this study impacted social change by providing information on methods that can be used to deliver meaningful professional development. This research study influenced the direction of professional development for the teachers in this district.

Summary

In Section 1, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) legislative ruling was used as a framework to discuss the benefits of effective professional development for general education and special education teachers. The purpose of this study was to investigate the types of professional development that general and special education teachers perceive to be beneficial when teaching in inclusive classrooms. The significance of this study emerged from the need to understand how teachers perceive the professional development they receive on inclusion of students with disabilities in order to modify professional development practices for teachers. Evidence was presented in the preliminary review of the literature about the perceptions of professional development

and teachers current views on the activities in which they currently participate. Section 1 also contained an overview of effective and ineffective professional development practices that impact teacher efficacy and consequently, student performance.

Section 2, the literature review, provides support for the research base of this study. It establishes a legal foundation for inclusion, discusses models of inclusive programs that influence teacher self-efficacy, and describes the benefits and disadvantages of inclusion, as well as explains teacher perceptions of inclusion and teacher preparation to teach in inclusive classroom environments. In Section 3, the research and data collection methodology of the study are explained and clarified. Section 4 presents the study findings. Section 5 concludes with the interpretation of the study findings from the teacher interviews and identifies recommendations for future research.

Section 2: Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to provide background information about the legal and philosophical basis of inclusion and professional development components and processes for general education and special education teachers. The literature review section includes the history of inclusion, inclusion models, effects of inclusion and inclusion's benefits and disadvantages, teacher perception of inclusion and its relationship to self-efficacy. In addition, the literature review discusses the legal precedents that guide the inclusion of students with special needs in general education classrooms. The review also examines the research on professional development models and teachers' perception of professional development.

The information in the literature review was gathered using the Walden University Library Database. ERIC and ProQuest Central data bases were used to locate articles for use in this literature review. Additional references and books listed in the references were sources of information gathered to enhance the literature review. The key search terms used were *perceptions, special education, educators, self-efficacy, inclusion, professional development, preparedness*, *No Child Left Behind, Individualized Education Plan* and *preparation*. These were used to locate information on the study because these terms relate to the study.

Teaching in Inclusion

Historical Legislation Addressing Inclusion

The practice of inclusion has changed throughout the history of special education. Research has established four consecutive phases of inclusion (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer & Shorgre, 2013). The first phase was mainstreaming, which was an

educational arrangement of returning students from special education classrooms to general education classrooms for nonacademic portions of the school day (Turnbull et. al, 2013). This was followed by the Regular Education Initiative, which attempted to reform general and special education by creating a single unified system that was designed to meet the child's needs in the general education classroom (Turnbull et al., 2013). The third phase that was implemented was inclusion through accommodations. This approach to inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education class was accomplished by adding instructional adaptations to the existing general education teaching and learning approaches (Turnbull et al., 2013). Lastly was inclusion through restructuring, which recreates general and special education by merging resources together to develop more flexible learning environments for all students and educators (Turnbull et al., 2013).

Public schools in the United States have struggled to provide equity to all learners regardless of race, cultural background, or social economic status (Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup & Palmer, 2010). While students were attending one room country schools, children who had disabilities stayed home. The earliest services were provided to students with hearing impairments in the 1500s, with visual impairments in 1784, and those with mental disabilities in 1911 (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011). It was important to change the education program so that children with special needs could be successful in public school. During the early 1950s, many schools established criteria for entrance into the public school setting. Students who were not toilet trained or who had serious medical or behavior problems were not allowed to attend public schools (Mastin, 2010). Groups of parents, professional advocates, and educators felt that this form of segregation was

immoral (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011). Segregation of students diagnosed with Down syndrome was also argued by these parents and professional advocates as unconstitutional, similar to the segregation of African Americans due to their race, a prominent issue of the 1950s (Mastin, 2010). Following the Brown vs. Board of Education Topeka (1954) decision that ended segregation in schools, the government began to involve itself in educational decisions to ensure that the law was being upheld and favorable to all. During the 1960s, special education evolved due to significant challenges to its assumptions, structures, and operations (Olinger, 2013). Many viewed special education as a program where the minority members, which consisted primary of disabled students, were denied the human rights of the majority, nondisabled students. The National Defense Education Act, passed during the 85th Congressional session, allowed greater opportunity to develop categorical support for education of the handicapped (Olinger, 2013). This act in conjunction with the publicity and support from the government led to opening institutions for children with special needs. The new laws were designed to change special education from a placement to a service (Lipsky & Gartner, 2012). Due to these changes, families began to feel more comfort in placing their profoundly disabled family members into these facilities.

During the 1970s, concerns about segregating special education students from students without disabilities began to arise and called for educational reform of special education programs (Olinger, 2013). Teachers initiated questions regarding efficacy of special education classes and expressed displeasure in features of most special education programs. The features included programs rooted in segregation and the process of identifying and labeling students. Additionally, teachers reported that assumptions are

often made that the improved special education services meant an increase special education professional development opportunity for general and special education teachers (Olinger, 2013). These concerns helped to commence structural changes in special education programs and led to the eventual passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for Handicapped Children Act, in 1975. This act, which was influenced by the Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) decision, signed by President Ford, attempted to ensure the rights of students with disabilities by providing them a free and appropriate education in the LRE, through the provision of FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education, 2012; Spring, 2012).

In1975, Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which guaranteed equal educational opportunities for all children with disabilities (Spring, 2012). According to Spring, this legislation mandated a FAPE in the LRE for all children identified as disabled. This law prevented the exclusion of children based on a handicap from public education (Spring, 2012). In 1990, PL 94-142 was reauthorized, amended and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2012). This reauthorization emphasized the need for regular education classrooms to meet the needs of students with disabilities, expand services, and maintain the LRE for students with disabilities (Spring, 2012). In the 1980s, general education teachers wanted to transition away from separate classes for students with disabilities (Winzer, 2012). General education teachers felt that a restructured system merging special and general education students and practices, focused on high expectations for all and rejecting prescriptive teaching and remedial approaches that lead to lower achievement, should be adopted (McLaughlin, 2010; Wisconsin Education AC, 2009).

The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act required IEP teams to determine if services were needed for students for increasing access to educational opportunities within the home, school, or community settings. The responsibility of IEP teams was to determine if students with disabilities were able to be educated in general education classrooms and have equal access to instruction (Judge & Simms, 2009).

In 2001 the NCLB Act was signed into law by President Bush, with the goal to ensure that states close the achievement gap between learners from diverse backgrounds (NCLB, 2011). The NCLB was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and designed to drive broad gains in student achievement and to hold states and schools accountable for student progress (NCLB, 2011). Schools were charged with the task of making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which would be based on state standardized assessments in the areas of mathematics and reading (NCLB, 2008). If schools fail to meet the standards over two consecutive years in the same area, students would have the option to utilize school choice. In theory, this option provided student placement into a school that had made AYP for at least 2 years, and the school not making AYP would be placed on a needs improvement status list (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). Due to the required task of making AYP, schools needed to examine the effectiveness of inclusionary programs.

In the past, schools were able to exclude students with disabilities from state assessments and avoid reporting their data as a part of the school's report; however, modified tests and testing situations (small groups) are currently in place so that there is no omitting of students with or without disabilities when reporting a school's

performance to determine if they have met AYP (NCLB, 2008). At the time these changes in law and accountability in education began, inclusion emerged (Singh & Glasswell, 2013). Public law 94-142 mandated that all school aged students with disabilities receive a FAPE in the LRE (Hargrove, 2010). Policymakers believed that most children who were eligible for special education services had the ability to participate in general education classrooms at various degrees (Hargrove, 2010). With the current use of inclusion in schools, teachers must be familiar with the proper models of inclusion in order to make each student's learning experience unique and worthwhile.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a concept that many educators across the country still struggle to understand. Inclusion involves bringing support services to the child, rather than moving the child to the service, and requires that the child will benefit from being in the class (CEC, 2013). Inclusion also guarantees that students with disabilities are included in the general education curriculum physically, socially, and instructionally with the support of the general and special educators working collaboratively to modify and supplement services that ensure the child's individual abilities are maximized for success (MacCarthy, 2010). Inclusion was designed to create schools where the needs of all students in the same grade level are met in the general education classroom (MacCarthy, 2010). The self-contained model was originally used to educate students with disabilities. In this environment student with disabilities were educated in isolation for more than 50 % of the day. After several years, the self-contained classroom model evolved into mainstreaming which we now know as inclusion (MacCarthy, 2010). Inclusion settings involve providing the least restrictive environments for learners.

The terms least restrictive environment, inclusion, and mainstreaming are often used interchangeably (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). They are not synonymous concepts. Least restrictive environment (LRE) refers to the IDEA's mandate that students with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with peers without disabilities (Yell, 2013). The LRE mandate ensures that schools educate students with disabilities in integrated settings, alongside students with and without disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate. Least restrictive environment is not a particular setting (Yell, 2013).

Inclusion refers to placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with peers without disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). Inclusion connotes more comprehensive programming than the term mainstreaming. The courts, however, tend to use the terms synonymously (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). Mainstreaming and inclusion are narrower terms than least restrictive environment (Yell, 2013). Although placement in the general education classroom may be the LRE for some students with disabilities, it is not required in all cases. The IDEA requires mainstreaming or inclusion when the general education classroom setting can provide an appropriate education (Yell, 2013). Under the IDEA, mainstreaming is a policy to be pursued so long as it is consistent with the Act's primary goal of providing disabled students with an appropriate education.

Educational Philosophy Behind Inclusion Models

There have been a variety of inclusionary definitions, which has led to confusion, variability in practice, and concerns about the proper implementation of inclusionary practices (Szypula, 2009). There must also be a clear collaboration between the general education and special education teachers for the learning of all students because inclusion

classrooms require that special education teachers spend more time in the general education classroom using instructional strategies that will be effective for all students (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009). Co-teaching is defined by Cook and Friend (1995) as "two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to adverse or blended groups of students in a single physical space" (p.2). Co-teaching is an opportunity for teachers to expand their knowledge and share ideas (Friend, 2013). Co-teaching can provide benefits such as having two teachers in one classroom rather than one which changes the student to teacher ratio as well as having the shared knowledge and experience of a special education teacher and a general education teacher (Friend, 2013). Friend (2013) discussed five models of coteaching teachers can use when teaching in an inclusive setting. These models of coteaching are: (1) one teach or lead, one support (observe); (2) station teaching; (3) parallel teaching; (4) alternative teaching; (5) team teaching. In the one teach one support model, one teacher leads and the other teacher offers support to individuals or group members (Friend, 2013).

Friend (2013) offers an analysis of the five options presented of the previous analysis in 2009. When using station teaching, students are divided into heterogeneous groups and work at classroom stations together in order to complete assignments. Parallel teaching is when each teacher works to plan the instructional program, but they each teach it to half the class or separate small groups in order to minimize the student to teacher ratio (Friend, 2013). Alternative teaching is when one teacher works with a small group in order to pre-teach, re-teach, supplement, or enrich while the other teachers works to instruct the larger portion of the group. Team teaching is when both teachers share the planning of the lesson and the teaching responsibilities in a coordinated format.

This occurs because most special educators express their lack of content knowledge in reading to employ one of the other suggested methods of coteaching. The information on the models of inclusion is relevant to the study because teachers are less self-efficacious in inclusion models (Moore & Hansen, 2011). This study seeks to investigate teachers' perceptions of the professional development that they receive to teach reading in inclusive environments.

Each model has its pros and cons. For example, when using parallel teaching, although the student to teacher ratio is very low, both teachers must be proficient in the content and in classroom management (Zigmond & Magiera, 2009). The noise level may also be a negative factor in a smaller learning environment (Zigmond & Magiera, 2009). In the "one teach, one observe" model, all students are able to receive the assistance from the teacher who is playing the part of the observer. However, if used too often, one teacher may become viewed as the paraprofessional, or a lesser presence in the room. The ways in which teachers are effectively prepared to use inclusive models and to work in programs are still emerging (Friend, 2013). This study seeks to understand the types of professional development that teachers find beneficial to teach in inclusive classrooms.

Benefits of Inclusion

Research on inclusion supports the positive impact on the lives of all learners, which has resulted in gained support for inclusive programs which include greater access to the curriculum, higher expectations, and increased social interactions and friendships (McDonnell & Brown, 2010). For example, some of the documented benefits of including secondary students in content-area classes (a)are increased opportunities to participate in the extracurricular activities of the school (Newman, Wagner, & Huang &

Shaver, 2011); (b)improved social interactions and relationships with peers without disabilities, especially when appropriate contextual arrangements and supports are provided; (c) increased access to the general education curriculum; (d) ;improved performance on alternate assessments tied to the mandates of IDEA 2004 and the No Child Left Behind Act (Roach & Elliot, 2009); and(e) improved post-school adjustment to employment, especially if students have taken general vocational education classes (Roach & Elliot, 2009).

Inclusionary settings for young children with disabilities include benefits such as gains in cognition, language, motor skills and increases in social developmental behaviors (Zigmond & Magiera, 2009). Comparable studies suggest that students taught in inclusive classrooms also have the benefit of gaining the attention of a second teacher, which can be helpful for those students with and without disabilities who need additional assistance (Zigmond & Magiera, 2009). Supporters of inclusion also sight meaningful community memberships and exposure to teachers as benefits of inclusion (Stocks, 2010). Research indicates that students with disabilities who take part in inclusive programming helped in creating caring and accepting learning communities of learners among same age peers (Stocks, 2010). Some inclusive programs resulted in satisfaction for the personnel and a dramatic reduction in per-student educational expenses. Salend (2011) suggested that students in inclusive programs have more engaged instructional time and have greater exposure to instructional activities. The placement of students in inclusive programs has advantages for learners. The literature supports inclusion as a best practice for students with disabilities.

Patterson, Connolly, and Ritter (2009) examined teachers who used co-teaching strategies in their inclusion math classes to provide differentiated instructions for students with disabilities. Students were not progressing as a result of poor instructional methods that were made up primarily of lecture-styled teaching. The teachers recognized the need to change their instructional delivery model to meet the needs of each student. As part of the study, the teachers were provided with models of co-teaching. (Patterson et al., 2009). After a year of learning in the differentiated inclusion class where the models were used, the findings of the study showed that students with disabilities demonstrated significant improvement in their content area classes.

Additionally, Hang and Rabren (2009) conducted a study on the effectiveness of the co-teach inclusion model. This mixed-methods study examined the views of general and special education teachers, teaching in an inclusive co-teaching class setting. The students' academic and behavioral records were used to determine the effectiveness of the co-teaching model. The results of the study revealed that teachers and students expressed positive views about co-teaching and inclusion. The study also found that the co-teaching inclusion model can be an efficient method to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities were met in the general education classroom.

Disadvantages of Inclusion

Those who oppose the inclusive movement claim that educating all students with disabilities in the general education classroom, regardless of their ability to function in that setting may be both unrealistic and harmful to learners (Stock, 2010). These opponents are concerned that general education teachers are not prepared to educate learners with disabilities, and it is suggested that the students who they teach will not

receive an appropriate education (Allison, 2010). Teachers who are faced with preparing students with disabilities for new and challenging high school assessments often question how reasonable it is to expect these students to be assessed on subject matter knowledge that they may not have been adequately taught in elementary and middle school (McLaughlin, 2010). Consequently, additional research suggests contrasting views to the benefits of inclusion (Irvine, Lupart, Loreman & Richmond, 2010). Their research suggests that challenges such as disruptive behavior of students with disabilities in a regular education classroom as well as the social and academic difficulties of regular education students can be a hindrance to inclusionary programs. Additional concerns are associated with general education teachers being reluctant and experiencing discomfort at the idea of giving up control of their classrooms and partnering with a special education teacher provide instruction in an inclusion based environment (MacCarthy, 2010). Furthermore, lack of training and support that many general education teachers receive when told to turn their classroom into one that practices inclusion is a disadvantage that is often ignored or not considered when principals implement inclusionary programs in schools (MacCarthy, 2010). The literature stated that there is a need to study specific techniques, staffing procedures, and training protocols that result in effective implementation for inclusion programs (MacCarthy, 2010).

Hargrove (2010) proposed that one of the challenges with inclusive programs is that they differ from school to school and rely on a variety of characteristics including resources at the school site and administrative support. In some schools, inclusion is implemented by modifications to the curriculum, content, and instruction while in others, it is the physical placement of students with special needs in the general education setting

(Friend & Cook, 2009). Because of these various models and understandings of inclusion, there is no distinct system in place to ensure that inclusive models are effectively managed. In a review comparing access to education of students with disabilities with the goals of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), it was determined that inclusion was difficult to effectively implement (McLaughlin, 2010). The literature points to inadequate training, negative teacher attitudes, and lack of confidence for teaching students with special needs as the main concerns that arise when implementing inclusion (Westing & Fox, 2009).

Another disadvantage of inclusive classrooms is that the socialization of students with disabilities often takes precedent over the academics. (MacCarthy, 2010). Educators and parents of children in general education worry that full inclusion will lower the standard of learning for the class and make it less of a priority than socializing. MacCarthy (2010) suggested that many inclusive programs focus on having students with disabilities sit in the general education classroom and look as though they are taking part in what is going on regardless of what they are learning. This is a disadvantage for students that are often overlooked in schools that use inclusive programs. Another disadvantage to inclusionary classrooms environments is that students with disabilities often leave the classroom with low self-esteem and low self-concept when compared to the general education students (MacCarthy 2010). Although the benefits and disadvantages of inclusion are all integral parts of general and special education programs, models of inclusionary programs are being adopted in schools in an attempt to maximize the learning experiences of all students (MacCarthy, 2010).

Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion

Negative and positive perceptions of general and special educators who teach students in inclusive settings have been discussed often in educational literature. Research reports that teacher attitude towards inclusion affects the success that inclusive classrooms experience (Friend & Cook, 2010). Smith (2011) also wrote that teacher attitude is one of the most important variables in innovative special education programs. Positive perceptions and feelings from educators in inclusive classrooms encourage appropriate polices and supportive integration of students with severe disabilities, but negative attitudes sustain low achievement expectations and unacceptable behaviors in any academic setting (Smith, 2011). Taylor (2009) suggested "one of the most important predictors for the successful assimilation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom stems from the attitudes of general education teachers" (p.17). The teachers' perceptions also influenced the classroom environment (Alexander, 2014). Several reasons for negative attitudes and perceptions of teachers in inclusion environments have been discussed. The factors that influenced negative attitudes include feelings of inadequate training and education, low self-efficacy, increased expectations on the general education teachers' ability to adequately provide instruction for special education which often results in poor academic achievement (Alexander, 2014). In summary a potential association between effective inclusionary programs and positive teacher perceptions of inclusion in schools may exist.

In a related study conducted to determine the feelings and attitudes of teachers, who had little teaching experience, towards inclusion, it is revealed that teachers held negative attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities being taught in the

general education setting (Carter, Prater & Dyches, 2009). Many general educators believe that students with disabilities are inappropriately placed in the general education setting (Carter et al., 2009). On the contrary, in 2010 Allison shared data from a research study that revealed that although general education teachers were reluctant to teach inclusive classrooms because of their lack of content knowledge, they did share the belief that students should be included in the general education classroom with their same age peers (Allison, 2010). In the past, the trend in education has been that teachers with more years of experience usually have more methods and more innovative ideas to meet the needs of learners with disabilities due to the knowledge they gleaned in previous experiences in the classroom (Allison, 2010). However, schools with thriving special education programs are facing difficulty due to teacher reluctance to educate students with special needs in inclusive settings (Hargrove 2010).

Downing (2010) conducted interviews in an elementary school to determine the perceptions that principals, general, and special education teachers had regarding inclusive programs. The most frequently mentioned issue that each group had in common was the negative attitude of educators about inclusion which include lack of support in the inclusion classroom, lack of confidence in their knowledge of special education, additional paperwork that must be completed, having to attend additional meetings and guilt and frustration about the time spent focusing on one group of students in the classroom (McLeskey & Waldron, 2010). Each participant expressed that they did not feel as though they could properly integrate students with disabilities into the general education setting even though they were aware of the positive outcomes that inclusive environments would provide for all learners (Downing, 2010). Each teacher held the

belief that inclusive settings provide students with the opportunity to interact with a variety of their peers that they may not normally encounter in school or in their community. This creates both acceptance and appreciation for diversity (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). The literature lays the groundwork for the study by showing that teacher perceptions may impact how effective they are in implementing inclusion.

The Council for Exceptional Children, which advocates for improving the educational success of individuals with disabilities, suggests that some of the most important concerns held by teachers who work in inclusive settings are time management, workload, and accountability (CEC, 2010). These matters have negatively affected the perceptions that teachers hold towards inclusion. Teachers have voiced their need for additional support when teaching in inclusive classrooms and continue to express their concerns to administrators about working in inclusive environments in a congruent study that took place in 2010.

Teacher Preparation

The No Child Left Behind Act (NLCB, 2009) called for highly qualified teacher educators and mandates that all students, including those with disabilities, make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on challenging state academic standards (Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2008). A part of ensuring that teachers are prepared to teach in inclusive classrooms is ensuring that they have the knowledge bank to draw from in order to support students with special needs when they complete pre-service education programs (Hargrove, 2010). There are little or in some cases no clear guidelines that discuss what teachers should be learning during the time that they spend in pre-service educational programs (Holdheide, Goe, Croft, & Reschly, 2010). There is also no

centrally agreed upon knowledge and content practice set that teachers who work in the field should use with students (Holdheide et al. 2010*).* However, teacher pre-service programs are urged to provide the appropriate knowledge and skills required in order to allow teachers to do the following: Create the best possible opportunities for all students (including those with special needs) to achieve at high levels; Support students with special needs in their efforts to perform at their grade level; and Use age appropriate general education standards and curriculum for all students, including those with special needs (Holdheide et al. 2010). Because there is little understanding from teachers on educating students with special needs, the correlation between what teachers learn in their pre-service programs and how their learning influences student outcomes once they enter the classroom, it is difficult to determine which methods and approaches should be employed in all pre-service programs (Holdheide, et al. 2010).

The inclusive school movement has been an impetus for change, not only in curriculum and instruction, but also in the roles of teachers and programs preparing teachers (Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2010). Therefore, teacher training facilities have a responsibility to ensure that all teacher especially pre-service teachers, are well prepared to meet the challenges of inclusion in the face of NCLB and IDEA requirements (Harvey, et al. 2010). Teachers who lack training in the most effective strategies for working with students with disabilities may hold negative feelings toward students with disabilities that decrease the students' chances for success in the regular classroom (Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). According to Alexander (2014) teachers must receive adequate training in teaching and meeting the needs of students to ensure student success in the inclusion classroom. In a study conducted by Blecker and Boakes (2010),

546 general education and special education teachers were surveyed to determine if they possessed the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to appropriately implement inclusion practices. The findings indicated that the teachers agreed on the importance of social interaction between disabled and nondisabled students. However, the study also indicated that special education educators were most likely to acknowledge the need for additional professional development (Blecker & Boakes, 2010).

Additionally, Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) conducted a study which examined the roles of new general education and special education teachers that focused on teacher training needs, and explored their participation in collaboration. According to Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez, "the call for increased skills, expanded supports, and more authentic experiences to better meet the range and intensity of student needs found in today's classrooms is a critical and essential message to teacher-preparation programs should respond" (p. 241). The results of this study were used to give suggestions for teacher-education pre-services education programs that may help improve their programs. This qualitative study explored the types of professional development that is beneficial to teach in inclusive classrooms.

Professional Development Models

Hirsh (2009) defines professional development as a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement (p. 10). Professional development is a way for teachers to enhance their knowledge base of particular instructional and developmental strategies to employ with students (Mertens, Flowers & Caskey, 2009). Professional development should be ongoing and embedded into a teacher's workday (Mertens et al, 2009). In writings found

in the National Middle School Association Journal, Mertens and Flowers (2003) stated that the desired outcome for professional development should be to improve student learning outcomes.

The National Staff Development Council currently known as Learning Forward (2012) offered a definition of professional development that should be used as a guideline for those who design professional development programs. The guidelines stated:

> Professional development fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and must be comprised of professional learning that (a) is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards as well as related local educational agency and school improvement goals; (b) is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders; (c) primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators engage in a continuous cycle of improvement that – evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance (Learning Forward p.1, 2012).

In the article Common Planning Time*,* Mertens, Flowers, Anfara, and Caskey (2010) stated that "Professional development for middle grades teachers should include three critical areas of knowledge: Content knowledge (deep understand of their discipline), Pedagogical knowledge (instructional strategies), and Knowledge about the uniqueness of young adolescent learners" (p. 50). This is true for most educational professional development programs, with variations in the area of age group. Killion

(2014) noted that teachers who are well prepared and trained are more effective in the classroom and therefore have the greatest impact on student learning. The National Center for Educator Statistics (2012) which is the primary federal entity responsible for analyzing and reporting data related to education, reported that teachers expressed that the more time they spend in professional development activities, the more likely they were to indicate that it had improved their instruction.

Guskey (2009) reported that student learning does not automatically follow professional development and that successful professional development will follow five levels: "participant's reactions, participant's learning, organizational support and change, participant's use of new knowledge and skills, and the intended student learning outcome" (p.4). Killion (2009) conducted a study that included 8 schools recognized for their efforts towards professional development from the U.S. Department of Education. These schools received the National Award for Model Professional Development. The study took place over the course of two years and data was collected through rigorous and in-depth interviews with teachers and principals. The research revealed that educators were willing to take part in on-site training if it was designed to meet the specific needs of their students (Killion, 2009). Killion also suggested several essentials for effective professional development, which included diverse and extensive learning experiences. Killion also proposed that teachers have the time, resources, leadership, shared governance, collaboration, focused goals, and support structures to foster their learning. Killion stressed that professional development will remain an ineffective practice in most schools until teachers take on greater leadership roles for learning in their community (Glazer & Hannafin, 2009).

Many researchers have studied what elements represent effective professional development (Garet et. al., 2001; Guskey, 2009; Hirsh, 2009). The traits that affect the effectiveness of professional development are many in number and highly complex. Of these characteristics that have been scrutinized, the most commonly supported by educational experts as improving the quality and effectiveness of professional development include:

"Enhancements to teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge based on the best available research evidence b) Incorporation of principles of adult learners c) Relevance and focus (i.e., results-driven) d) Standards-based e) Ongoing and continuous f) Embedded in day-to-day responsibilities g) Aligned with school-wide improvement goals h) Collaborative and collegial and i) Provides opportunities for discussion, reflection, and follow-up" (NMSA, 2010 p. 2). When the aforementioned elements considered, varying types of professional development allow for teacher growth in content knowledge and understanding.

Educators should have the opportunity to take part in many professional development opportunities. However, the one size fits all approach does not prove to be an effective format to use in educational professional development (NSMA, 2010). There are many models or approaches to professional development that can be utilized by educators. There is formal professional development and informal professional development. Formal professional development includes activities such as attending workshops and classes or visiting other schools, while informal professional development includes study groups, peer coaching, mentoring, observations, collaborative planning and reviewing student work in teams (NMSA, 2010).

Professional development can also be presented in a traditional form and in a reform model. The traditional professional development forms are considered to be episodic, fragmented, and one time approaches with a leader or expert doing the training. Examples include but are not limited to workshops, courses, and conferences, which are structured with participants attending sessions at scheduled times outside of school hours (Garet, et al, 2011). The reform types of professional development include activities that are focused on a set of skills designed to coach and provide feedback that lends to classroom implementation of innovative instructional strategies (Garet et al., 2011). Examples of this type of professional development include study groups or networking which can take place during the school day in the teacher's classroom or during planning time (Garet et al., 2011). This type of professional development proves to be more effective because it makes connections with classroom teaching and is ongoing. With the reform method being consistently used over a longer period of time, teachers who used it were more likely to discuss the concepts, issues, share materials, and student needs at a higher frequency (Garet et al., 2011).

Thompson and Goe (2009) revised the six models of professional development established by Sparks and Loucks-Horsey. Six models of professional development were identified that could be used for educators to enhance their performance. They include: (a) individually guided professional development, (b) observation / assessment, (c) involvement in curriculum development, (d) training, (e) inquiry, and (f) backward mapping. In each model, there are essential elements that create a unique learning experience for the learner. The models require observations and assessments of the educator's performance. The individually guided model requires the individual educator

to assess their strengths and weaknesses and to self-prescribe staff development. The observation model relies on an outside observer to evaluate a lesson and suggest professional development. The curriculum development or school improvement model allows the professional development to be aligned with the school improvement plan and to stay within the boundaries of the school's policies and procedures. The training model distinguishes itself as a one-time session with no follow up. The inquiry model begins with data being collected and an action plan being developed with follow up observations and evaluations of the action plan. The back mapping model begins with the end in mind and utilizes five steps in the professional development process, which include determining student achievement needs, determining educator needs, studying possible interventions, planning a program and implementation process, and providing ongoing support and monitoring progress (Garet et al, 2009; Sparks and Loucks-Horsey 1989).

Teacher Perceptions of Professional Development

A major problem with professional development programs is that teachers often express that these programs are inadequate in serving their needs, and that there is little effect on student achievement afterwards (Guskey, 2009; Mastin, 2010). Shagrir (2010) also reported that teacher rarely engage in professional development that proceeds at a steady and predictable pace during their time working as educators. They contend that the factors that influence professional development lead them to negative and unsupportive feelings due to the impeding nature of the courses they were involved in (Shagrir, 2010).

In a comparable study conducted by Lancaster (2009), the data suggested that teachers' perceptions towards professional development are directly correlated to their self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) also supports the notion that the attitude that a person has

towards a subject has an effect on that person's willingness to participate in activities that relate to the subject. Knight (2009) suggested that the way that teachers view professional development in their school on any given day will inevitably be shaped by the manner in which they experience professional development in the past. Adults also have varying perceptions towards professional development because of the methods used to instruct them. Often the fact that adults and children do not learn in the same manner is not taken into consideration (Trehearn, 2010). With this in mind, it is important that more research is completed to analyze teacher perceptions of the professional development received to teach in inclusion classrooms.

Self-Efficacy

Bandura (2009) wrote that what makes us most human is the ability to self-reflect; therefore, it is a prominent feature of the social cognitive theory. People use the process of self-reflection to make sense out of their experiences, to understand their own beliefs, to define their abilities, and to shape their actions. Self-efficacy is at the core of the social cognitive theory. It is "one's beliefs of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 31: Bandura, 2009). Self-efficacy is the foundation for human motivation, wellbeing and personal accomplishment (Bandura, 2009). Additionally, Bandura purported that self-motivation and actions were grounded in what people believe they can accomplish than on what is rationally true. Self-efficacy helps determine what individuals feel they can do with what they know.

A teacher's level of self-efficacy is related to how they will perform. The way a teacher perceives their level of content knowledge inevitably affects their performance.

If teachers perceive that they are able to educate students effectively in inclusive settings, then they may work harder to educate students because they feel equipped to do so. Many general education teachers lack the professional development and training from coursework needed to teach students with disabilities (Saracho, 2013).

Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, and Barbe, (2010) shared the results from a study in which teacher efficacy was explored along with democracy and the teachers' ability to manage behavioral problems. The results of the study concluded that teachers often revert to responses that are restrictive more than they used responsive or helpful responses to students with special needs. In these instances, the teachers had the knowledge on helpful and appropriate responses, but did not implement their knowledge in real classroom situations (Tsouloupas et al, 2010). Teachers' perceptions of inclusive classrooms were also observed by Leatherman in "I Just See Children as Children": Teachers' perceptions about inclusion, (2007). Teachers were interviewed using open-ended questions that focused on their experiences when teaching students with special needs. The results presented data which reflected that teachers' knowledge was influenced by the experiences within their classroom settings. The relationship between the teachers' knowledge and experience had an impact with their level of efficacy when teaching in inclusion classrooms.

Additional research on self-efficacy and professional development suggests that that the educator is the most essential element that affects the learning of students in the classroom (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2010). The attitude and the expectations that are set forth by the teacher affect the performance of the students (Marzano et al, 2010). Reschly and Christenson (2009) assert that there is a need for continued research

on teacher attitude. The focus of the future research should be to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that promote positive teacher attitudes. Due to the overwhelming amount of inclusive programs that are operating in public schools, it is important that teacher attitude is examined and addressed since it could affect the outcomes and efforts used to implement inclusion.

Various studies have been conducted on school districts and their attempts at implementing inclusion. Researchers support the continued use of the qualitative methodology to investigate special education programs that use inclusion because it provides research that may benefit students with special needs (Barnartt & Altman, 2009). Begeny (2011) conducted a longitudinal study over thirty years in Europe of inclusion practices in primary and secondary schools and reported that additional exploratory methods be applied to study inclusion because some studies did not support inclusion for all students with special needs in studies that had taken place in the United States. Downing (2010) used interviews in their study to determine if inclusive education was good for students with moderate or severe disabilities. Interviews made up of open-ended questions provide the researcher with the chance to go deeper into the feelings and thoughts of each participant that takes part in the study. Teacher interviews provide the researcher the opportunity to learn how teachers perceive professional development they receive to teach reading in inclusive classrooms.

Summary

Society continues to debate the most appropriate avenue for educating students with disabilities. The literature reviewed in this study illustrated that many schools are implementing inclusion and use co-teaching as the method to deliver instruction for

students with disabilities (Friend, 2011; Friend & Bursuck, 2009) Many legislative mandates were created to effectively implement inclusion. These changes occurred due to pressures from advocates for students with disabilities and legal pressure from legislature. The review of literature began with the history of special education and the start of inclusion in schools, followed by a discussion of the educational philosophy behind inclusion models. I discussed the benefits and disadvantages of inclusion and teachers' perceptions of inclusion in schools. Teacher preparation and the models of professional development were discussed in the literature review. The literature also discussed the various methods used in the practice of inclusion as well as teachers' perception of the professional development for inclusion and self-efficacy.

Section 3 contains: a description of the research methodology that I use in this study, the research design, the research questions, the role of the researcher, a description of how I selected the participants, the data collection procedures, data analysis and procedures for ethical protection of participants.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the types of professional development that teachers find beneficial when teaching in inclusive environments. Section 3 provides a comprehensive discussion of the research design, research questions, targeted population, sample, setting, measures that guarantee protection of the participants' rights, instrumentation, role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis. The study included interviews that were used to analyze the data gathered during the study. The procedures in this qualitative study required a detailed analysis of general education and special education teachers' perceptions of professional development and inclusion. The resources in this study included participant interviews.

Research Design

I selected a qualitative case study design for this study. Qualitative research forms a complete overview of what is being studied by analyzing words, reporting detailed views of the participants involved, and conducting the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012). Merriam (2009) stated that in qualitative research the focus is on the meaning and understanding of the topic and that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection. The author went on to state that the final product should be richly descriptive.

Many research methods could have been utilized for this study. Each of these various methods can be used to investigate the types of professional development that teachers perceive to be beneficial when teaching in an inclusive environment. Quantitative research provides exact data that is essential when studying large groups of

people (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). Quantitative researchers collect data from participants and test a hypothesis while emphasizing statistical data and facts (Steffes, 2011). Although data and facts provide the results for a hypothesis, the two do not give the specific details into how or why a phenomenon takes place. Quantitative data also provide a high level of validity and are usually unbiased (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). Additionally, quantitative research is used to investigate the differences among groups and relationships among variables in terms of scientific phenomena (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative research normally starts with a hypothesis, followed by completing an experiment or using a survey to collect data (Creswell, 2011). Quantitative methodologies also use mathematical analysis to establish laws and principals (Creswell, 2009). Henson, Hull, and Williams (2011) noted that quantitative methods are important but not sufficient for problems faced by education research. Although all of the aforementioned elements are important, they do not answer the research questions for this study.

The mixed-methods research approach is an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms (Creswell, 2009). It involves philosophical assumptions and the mixing of both approaches in a study. A mixed-methods approach involves more than collecting qualitative and quantitative data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the strength of the overall study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell, 2009). Although this method was considered for this study, it was not selected because the emphasis on statistical data, facts, and causes of behavior presented in quantitative data would not lend to the thick, rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants (Evans, 2012).

Professional development is too complex to narrow into a few isolated variables and because this study involves the perceptions based on a person's lived experiences, a qualitative research design was utilized. Merriam (2009) reported that qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding the social experience, that the researcher must be the primary instrument for data collections and analysis, and that the final product is richly descriptive. Qualitative research also seeks to produce descriptive knowledge that answers what is happening and why or how it is happening (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research has also influenced the values, practices, and interpersonal interactions between staff that shape educational procedures (Mertens, 2009). Therefore, the qualitative approach was the best choice for this study. The main question in this study is what types of professional development do teachers find beneficial when teaching in an inclusive environment. There are also subquestions that were used to investigate this phenomenon. Qualitative research was determined to be the best methodology to explore the problem in this study because a quantitative approach would prevent unidentified information from emerging from participant data (Morrow, 2011). Quantitative methods can allow the researcher to get a broad understanding of a phenomenon or problem that exists within a group or community, while qualitative research approaches are able to explore the complex processes or underlying elements of the problem and illustrate the nature of a human experience while presenting an in-depth view of the phenomenon.

There are several approaches to use when conducting qualitative research in the field of education. Merriam (2009) suggested nine qualitative approaches: basic interpretive, case study, critical, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis,

phenomenology, and postmodern, (p. xivv). Creswell (2010) contended that there are five approaches used in qualitative research: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative research, and phenomenology.

In this qualitative study many approaches were considered to gather data to answer the research questions Grounded theory is used to develop a theory strictly grounded in data, hence the name "grounded theory" (Merriam, 2009). Grounded theory was considered, but this approach was not selected because I do not seek to create a theory regarding the professional development that teachers receive to teach in inclusion classrooms. The narrative research approach uses stories and first person accounts of experiences told in the form of a story. The narrative approach was not selected because of the limited view of professional development that might be gained by only exploring the life of one individual (Creswell, 2009). The phenomenological approach is used to capture the essence of an experience (Merriam, 2009). This approach was not selected for this study because the goal of the study is not to understand the essence of a particular issue but rather to explore the perceptions of general and special education teachers regarding professional development for teaching in the inclusive classroom. Additionally, the use of a phenomenological approach would not provide the information needed to fully address the research questions in the study (Merriam, 2009). Ethnography is a form of qualitative research that was developed by anthropologists specifically to study human society and culture (Merriam, 2009). Ethnography focuses on values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape human behavior (Merriam, 2009). Ethnography was not determined to be an effective approach because it and aims to explore the ways in which the researcher influences the study rather than the informants (Hatch, 2002).

This study used a case study approach to investigate the types of professional development general and special education teachers perceive to be beneficial when teaching in inclusive environments. A case study is an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as a person, a group, or a community (Creswell, 2012). Since this study focused on the perceptions of a group of people, a qualitative case study design is appropriate. "The case study research approach is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or case over a time period through detailed, in-depth data collection and reports that include description of the case and themes" (Creswell, 2009 p.13). In this case, general and special education teachers comprise the bounded system studied.

There are various types of case studies. A descriptive case study presents a complete description of the phenomenon within its context (Yin, 2009). An exploratory case study is aimed at defining the questions and hypotheses of a subsequent study or at determining the feasibility of the desired research (Yin, 2009). An explanatory case study presents data bearing cause-effect relationships; explaining how events happened and are connected (Yin, 2009). An explanatory case study was used in this study. This type of case study is used when researchers seek to answer a question that attempts to explain the presumed casual links in real life that are too complex for surveys or experimental strategies (Yin, 2009). The purpose of a qualitative case study is to investigate one specific situation, such as teachers' perception of the types of professional development that are beneficial for teaching in inclusive environments and to provide a detailed explanation of the issue (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, I determined that an explanatory case study approach was appropriate for this study.

Research Questions

The primary research question that was addressed in this study was:

RQ: What types of professional development do general and special education teachers need when teaching in inclusive environments?

Additionally, the following subquestions were used to probe deeper into the problem the study has identified:

SQ1: What are the professional development needs identified by general education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

SQ2: What are the professional development needs identified by special education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

SQ3: How might professional development be used to improve the current inclusion programs?

Context of Study

The context for this research study was a rural middle school system in a southern state. The facility in which the study was conducted was referred to as the study site to ensure confidentiality of the participants. The elements or framework of the study consists of the setting, social action, participants, and activities in which the participants engage (Hatch, 2002). The study site included general education teachers and special education teachers. The study investigated the types of professional development that general and special education teachers perceive to be beneficial when teaching in inclusive environments. Interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of the activities that the participants engage in within the workplace. Permission to conduct research in the study site was granted from the principal of the study site and the district

superintendent. There was no district IRB approval required from the study site. The rationale for selecting this location to conduct research was based upon the fact that a problem existed at the local middle school regarding professional development and the efforts to enhance and refine teacher performance levels in inclusive environments. Additionally, access was granted because of the pre-existing professional relationship with employees in the study site.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in a qualitative study serves as "the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 2009 p. 175). Qualitative research experts suggested that researchers acknowledge their personal connections to the study up front, rather than pretending they do not exist (Creswell 2003; Merriam, 2009). I gathered all data for this study by conducting semi structured interviews with participants focused on the educators' perceptions of the types of professional development that are beneficial when teaching in an inclusive environment. I listened and gathered the data during each interview and worked to establish a private setting consisting of me and the participant to gain honest and clear descriptions of the phenomenon. I also collected the data, organized the data, and analyzed the data, which required transcribing interviews, and analyzing documents. The interviews were recorded, and I transcribed the audio recorded interviews by writing down the responses to each question provided by the participant. I transcribed all of the interview data and ensure that it was transcribed accurately due to its pertinent information.

I do not hold a position at this school, nor do I supervise any potential participants. In this situation, I acknowledge my personal opinions on the study and

teachers' perception of the professional development they receive to teach reading in inclusive classrooms. As a teacher who works in classrooms that use inclusion, I have experienced the need for additional professional development that will allow for more effective teaching and learning in the classroom environment to students with special needs. I believe that teachers need and desire training in the area of inclusion that will align with new educational reform. During the interviews my opinions were not discussed and the focus was on the subject. It was understood that the results of the data analysis were subject to interpretation. I took steps to ensure that I remained neutral throughout the study. In qualitative research the terms emic and etic are used frequently (Creswell, 2012). Emic refers to the researcher's ability to remain open to the understanding of the phenomenon form the participant's point of view (Merriam, 2009). The word etic is reserved for the participant's point of view and it forces the researcher to distinguish their point of view from the participant's. It was be imperative for me to remain emic during the study. This was done by acknowledging my biases regarding the phenomenon without discussing them with the participants. I also asked for clarity on any response that may need to be expounded upon. Additionally, I kept an open mind to the responses given by the participants.

Measures for Ethical Protection of Participants

Ethical protection of each participant must be used to maintain and secure the rights of each person who takes part in this study. For this reason, I made every effort to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of each participant. Pseudonyms were used for each participant. Names were not used in the reporting information. Names were not placed on protocols. Comments from participants were not shared with their supervisor or

others. An interview protocol was used to explore teachers' perceptions of the type of professional development that are beneficial when teaching in inclusion environments. For this study, the researcher gained the approval of Walden University Instructional Review Board (IRB 09-28-16-0084027) prior to conducting this study.

While reviewing potential participants for this study, there were many factors to consider that may affect the results of the research. The various ethnicities, age, years of experience in teaching, socioeconomic status of each individual and their state of mind on the day of the interview all play an important part. Although these considerations did not cause any participant to be removed from the study, ethically, it was critical to understand that the participants' mood and current status could have an effect on their state of mind when taking part in the interview.

Prior to conducting the study, each participant was asked to sign a consent form which included a description of the study, risks and benefits of the study, and confidentiality issues (Appendix B). Participants were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without any obligation as their participation is completely voluntary. Participants were allowed to ask questions and obtain a copy of the results at the conclusion of the study.

Setting

The setting of this study was a small rural middle school located in a county in a southern state. During the 2014-2015 school year, this school served 541 students in Grades 6 through 8 with a diverse student population where 69% of the students were eligible to receive free and or reduced lunch. According to the state website, the student enrollment for the year was 48% Black, 44% White, 6% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Asian, and

1% Multi-Racial (https://gosa.**georgia**.gov/**report-card)**. Special education students make up 13.1% of the total student population. The special education students in this school received instruction through co-taught inclusion classes during the school day. The number of inclusion students in a classroom varies from class to class.

A key element in qualitative research is determining how many participants to include in a study. The typical sample size for a qualitative study is a relatively small (Creswell, 2012). When a sample is too large, it is often impossible for the research to discover the individual perceptions of the situation. The appropriate point to stop collecting data is the point when the researcher no longer finds any new information or insights in additional data (Creswell, 2009). Convenience sampling was used to select participants for this study. Convenience sampling is a process of selecting participants for examination and analysis based on accessibility, (Creswell ,2012). The study site was selected because a problem exists in the educational community that supports a need for a rigorous study to increase understanding and interpretations of teachers' perceptions regarding professional development.

Participants

General education and special education teachers working in inclusive classrooms at the study site were invited to participate in this study via email and written notice. The targeted participants were middle grades general education and special education teachers in a public school district located in a Southern state. The teachers selected to participate in the study were teachers who currently or have previously taught in inclusive environments and sign the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix…). The levels of teaching experience ranged from one year of experience to more than 20 years of

experience. Each teacher has taught a student with special needs in an inclusive setting during his or her career in education. Participants were invited to take part in the study through notices posted on a bulletin board in the teacher lounge and through a general email that was sent to all middle grade general education and special education teachers. Through the use of purposeful criterion sampling, 10 participants participated in the study based on a criterion sampling. Five of the teachers were general education teachers and five of the teachers were special education teachers. This type of sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have shared similar experiences (Creswell,2012). Participants for the study were selected based on the following criteria: (a) identified as a certified educator, (b)identified as a general or special education teacher who currently works in inclusion environments, or (c) identified as a general educator or special educator who has taught in an inclusion class. Teachers who decide to take part in the study emailed me to express their interest to take be a part of the study and get additional information. A meeting was scheduled at the study site prior to the interviews to meet with potential participants to inform them of information about the study and have them sign consent documents. Participants were informed that there was no compensation for their participation. Participants were also informed that their involvement in the research was be voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Mertens (2009) suggested that the appropriate number of participants for research is six while Creswell (2012) suggested that 10 participants are adequate. For this study a sample size of 10 participants was used that is sufficient to gather data regarding general and special education teachers' perceptions of the types of professional development that

would be beneficial for teaching in inclusive environments. The teachers with the most experience were given priority over those with the least experience.

Data Collection Procedures

Proper data collection procedures are essential in research studies to enhance its level of credibility. In this research study, all the data was collected using semi structured interviews (Merriam, 2009). A semi-structured interview is a formal interview between an interviewer and a respondent during which the interviewer uses an interview guide that contains questions focused on a specific topic (Creswell, 2012). The interviewer develops and asks the question in a specific order to the participants (Merriam, 2009). A semi-structured interview is open; allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says (Merriam, 2009).

Prior to beginning this study, approval was obtained to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University. Once I received approval from Walden IRB, I contacted the principal of the school to receive approval to conduct this study at the school site prior to the starting the study. The principal contacted the superintendent and gained permission for the study to take place within the district. Potential participants were contacted and invited to participate in this study with a letter that was sent to the study site that was posted in the teacher's lounge and employee sign-in desk to appeal to more educators to take part in the study. Teachers who volunteer to participate in the study were asked to send their confirmation via e-mail. I e-mailed each eligible teacher who volunteers an invitation to participate (see Appendix B) in the study using my Walden University email address. Next, I emailed them a consent form to review. Teachers signed the informed consent document when we met individually. After

I received each Consent Form from each participant, I scheduled a time and date to meet with each teacher to review the one on one semi structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). Each participant selected a time, place, and date that was conducive to his or her schedule. Interviews were scheduled during non-instructional time; I collected the Interview Protocol upon completing each the semi structured interview with each participant.

During the course of the research study, I conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with each participant. During a semi-structured interview, I asked a list of questions and the interviewee responded. Semi-structured interviews allow new ideas to be brought up during the interview by the participant (Creswell, 2009). A list of these questions can be reviewed from Appendix A.

Teachers were interviewed during the data collection process. Each participant was asked a series of questions to better understand the identified phenomenon. An audio tape system was used and notes were added for the purpose of transcribing and accuracy. The interviews were used to collect data about the participants' perceptions of the types of professional development they find beneficial when teaching in inclusive classrooms. After the data was collected, all identifiable information such as participant names, school district name and specific location of the school were eliminated and a pseudonym was assigned to represent each participant and their response. It was important to keep the identity of participants anonymous to protect them from reprisal from people in authority should the participants offer any information that may portray the system in an unfavorable manner. All consent forms were kept in a locked file cabinet at my home. I was the only person who had access to the data. All tape recorded information was

transcribed, checked for accuracy, and then secured in a locked closet. All forms and tape recordings were secured in a private office on an external hard drive and locked in a closet when it was not in use during data analysis. After the study, all forms and tape recordings were stored in a locked safe until the required five years after which time they will all be destroyed. In reporting the results, pseudonyms were used to represent each individual who participated in the study.

Instrumentation

An interview instrument was employed in this study. Qualitative research questions need to articulate what the researcher wants to know about the perceptions of those involved in a social phenomenon (Ajee, 2009). Creswell (2012) noted that research questions need to increase the understandings of a problem. With a qualitative study, the researcher is inquiring about topics such as how people are experiencing an event, a series of events, or a condition, the questions that the research creates usually seek to uncover the perceptions of an individual, a group, or various groups, (Ajee, 2009). The interview instrument that was used in this study was created by me. The questions were written and revised to reflect the literature. The interview questions were also written in order to obtain data to answer the main research question of the study and from what was learned about the problem through the review of the literature. The interview protocol was designed using carefully worded questions to gather data from participants. The interview questions were developed so that various parts of the teachers' lived experiences, perceptions, professional development needs, and professional development concerns could be explored and understood in relationship to the identified problem (see Appendix A).

Data Analysis

In qualitative research the researcher seeks to determine how and why things happen in a selected phenomenon or in a particular way (Creswell, 2009). Through data analysis, researchers look for systematic meaning through methodology (Creswell, 2009). In recognizing patterns, categories, or themes, the data can be connected and interpreted by the researcher (Johnson and Christensen, 2010). A pattern is established when a word or phrase appears multiple times in the data. The patterns form a theme which is a group of similar words and phrases. The themes are placed in categories. The categories show relationships between the data and are displayed graphically (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative data analysis calls for coding and searching for patterns and relationships until a bigger picture is created (Creswell, 2009). Words or phrases that appear in qualitative research multiple times help to create a clear picture of the phenomenon or problem that is being studied.

The data obtained from each interview was transcribed by me. Next, each participant had the opportunity to review the transcribed data for accuracy. I sent the participants the transcribed interview via my Walden University email and ask for confirmation and accuracy of the data. The participants were able to review the coded data and the findings of the data. The participants provided feedback by responding to the email. The data was coded and analyzed throughout the study. Coding is when words or phrases that appear frequently throughout the data are written down using shorthand and transmitted into words and phrases (Creswell, 2012). The phrases were analyzed by looking for commonalities within the information. Coding is a process for both categorizing qualitative data and for describing the implications and details of these

categories (Creswell, 2009). Initially the researcher does *open coding*, considering the data in minute detail while developing some initial categories (Creswell, 2009). Open coding was used to place the data into categories. Corbin and Strauss (2009) noted that opened coding is the process of examining data, breaking it down, comparing it, and categorizing the data. The concepts are compared and scrutinized for similarities and differences. Merriam (2009) reported that coding is transferring shorthand to segments of information to be used at a later time. I began by analyzing the data by applying open coding to look for broad themes in the interview transcripts (Creswell, 2009). Open coding is when tentative labels are created for chunks of data that summarize what you see happening after reading the data several times (Creswell, 2009). Next, the data was sorted into initial categories and themes based on small details. Finally, the data was assigned a code based upon the responses of the participants and their perceptions of beneficial professional development. After the themes were identified I categorized the data and examined the patterns that emerged from the data.

Later, the researcher moves to more selective coding where he or she systematically codes while focusing on the perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Selective coding was used to arrive at the results and assist me as I organized themes, categorize and identify central ideas from the data (Creswell 2003, p. 191; 2009, p.437; Merriam, 2009, p. 149). During this process, I read and reread the transcripts and selectively coded any data that related to the core variable identified in the responses (Merriam, 2009). After transcribing the information collected during each interview, I reviewed the data looking for themes and categorized the data. The patterns or common themes that emerge were organized and used in the final report. I reviewed the interview

data after the first interview and after the follow up interview if it is needed. As the information emerged into themes and categories in the HyperResearch program, the I cataloged the results and the themes were reexamined or modified for accuracy (Steffes, 2010).

HyperResearch is the qualitative software program that was used to organize the end report. The software program assisted in the process of generating information that was transferred to tables to organize and record data. This was helpful because interviews generate a large amount of data that must be categorized into groups based on themes and the software allowed this to be completed more easily. HyperResearch allows the researcher to manipulate data to hear all the information that could fit into common themes (Merriam, 2009). It was through these themes that common types of beneficial professional development begin to emerge. I looked for words and phrases that appeared frequently in the data and recorded them while examining the data closely for similarities and differences. The information was written in a form of shorthand and transmitted to segments of information (Merriam, 2009).

Member checking was done to authenticate the results with the participants (Hatch 2002; Creswell, 2009). Each participant was informed of member checking prior to taking part in the study. Prior to analyzing the data, I sent each participant a copy of their transcribed interview and asked for them to review the transcript for accuracy. This provided me with the opportunity to edit or elaborate on the findings based on their feedback (Creswell, 2009). After the data was analyzed and interpreted, each participant was asked to review the interpretation of their data to confirm or disconfirm the accuracy of my interpretation of their data (Merriam, 2009). No inaccuracies were recorded and

included in the data analysis and in the results of the study. Validity was strengthened by the exclusion of inaccuracies and inclusion of exact evidence, (Brantley, 2009). In this case I am attempted to present unbiased and accurate results. Table 2 depicts the data analysis process that was used in the study.

Table 1.

Data Analysis Process

Data: Interviews	
Confirmation of transcribed data	
Apply open coding	Record broad themes
Member checking	
Rearrange data	Determine categories
Apply selective coding	Answer guiding questions

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Validity, also known as credibility and trustworthiness, is defined by Merriam (2009) as truthfulness and authenticity. Validity or credibility for any qualitative study involves the use of several strategies which can include triangulation of data, member checking, reflexivity and peer examination (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, validity helps to bridge the phenomenon or paradigm and the data. Researchers who use qualitative methods ensure authenticity by providing sincere, reasonable, and balanced description of the point of view of those who have experienced a particular phenomenon daily (Brantley, 2009). Internal validity in qualitative research requires the researcher to establish that the results of the study are credible or believable from the perspective of the

participant (Brantley, 2009). External validity in qualitative research refers to the ability to transfer the results of one study to other settings (Merriam, 2009; Brantley, 2009). Member checking was used to ensure validity of this study.

To enhance the possibility that the results of a study can be used in another study, many strategies can be used such as using rich thick descriptions (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2009) noted that the use of rich, thick description conveys the findings with such detail that it might transport the readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences. Rich thick description was used in this study along with member checking. Member checks involve allowing the participants to comment on the accuracy of the interpretation of their interviews. During member checking, the researcher asks the participants to check the accuracy of my interpretation of their interview data. Member checking in an effective is a way to find out whether the data analysis is congruent (Carlson, 2010). Participants are given the opportunity to edit, clarify, elaborate, and or delete their own words from the interpreted themes and patterns recorded by the researcher. I ensured that the participants felt the descriptions were realistic and complete and gave the participants time to respond and clarify any unclear statements. For this study, rich, thick description was used to describe the setting and participants of the study as well as the data collection, analysis, and results. Rich, think description is defined as "describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail that one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people" (Lincoln and Guba, 2013 p. 105). Because case study research is subjective by nature, establishing validity and reliability was a core element of this study.

Reliability

Merriam (2009) defines reliability as consistency of the results after repeated trials. The reliability or consistency of a study refers to the extent to which the research findings can be replicated (Merriam, 2009). In other words, if the study were performed by another researcher would it yield the same results. The reliability of a qualitative study can be improved through triangulation, peer examination, reflexivity, and clarification of the researcher's position (Merriam, 2009). For the study, reliability was improved by presenting samples of coding in the appendixes. I also provided a description of how the data from the interviews were collected, how categories were coded, and how themes were selected in the study. After the first participant was interviewed, I created a chart and began to document themes that emerged from the data and continued this documentation throughout the duration of the study. Reliability can also be enhanced by using the same interview questions with all participants, thus obtaining comparable descriptions of the lived experiences (Brantley, 2009).

Strength and trustworthiness of research is solidified with the ability to obtain the thick, rich description of the phenomenon under the study. All participants were asked the same interview questions. Merriam (2009) noted that member checking is a critical strategy for establishing trustworthiness. During member checking, participants are asked to review the tentative findings of the study to determine their plausibility. Therefore, I sent each participant a summary of the tentative findings of the study and ask each of them to comment of the credibility of these findings. If necessary, the findings were adjusted to reflect their comments. Participants also had the opportunity to listen to their audio recorded interviews if they desire to do so. Additionally, the participants signed a

form indicating they have reviewed the transcript and agree to the best of their knowledge that the responses were accurately transcribed.

Summary

Section 3 provided a detailed description of the methodology that was used for qualitative case study. A concise explanation about the primary research question and sub questions and their significance was given. Information on how I interacted with the participants in this study was overviewed. The participant selection process was explained as well as the importance of ethical protection for the participants. Transitioning into the data collection, an explanation was given of how the data was collected. The software program HyperReasearch was utilized to assist with coding, organizing, and manipulating the transcribed data and aided in discovering important themes within each interview. Other information discussed included strategies within qualitative methodology and why a qualitative case study approach was selected for this study. Additionally, the interview process was discussed and the steps for measures to ensure reliability and validity were reviewed within the study. Section 4 will provide an in-depth analysis and synthesis of the transcribed interview, patterns discovered in the data using HyperResearch software, and the relationships and themes within this data along with a brief description of the data and analysis, data collection procedures, and the results of the study as it relates to the research questions was discussed.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of professional development for teaching in an inclusive environment. Professional development has been examined from various perspectives. However, little research has given voice to the experience of teachers as it relates to professional development related to inclusive environments. The goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the current and future professional development needs for general education and special education teachers to support efficient and effective professional development experiences for teachers. This section provides a detailed explanation of the data collection process, description of data analysis, results, and evidence of quality. Following that, I discuss the findings from the research questions followed by a summary.

This study was conducted in a public middle school in southern rural Georgia. All procedures for selecting participants and the facilitation of the study were completed under the guidelines of the Walden University Institutional Review Board. The research question and sub questions that guided this study were as follows:

RQ: What types of professional development do general and special education teachers need when teaching in inclusive environments?

SQ1: What are the professional development needs identified by general education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

SQ2: What are the professional development needs identified by special education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

SQ3: How might professional development be used to improve the current inclusion programs?

Demographics

For this case study, 10 participants agreed to be interviewed. Teaching experience within the inclusive classroom environment varied for each participant. The interview participants represented a wide range of teachers including male (3) and female (7), and all content areas were represented including language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Five of the participants were general education teachers and five of the teachers were special education teachers. Table 1 presents the specific demographics of the participants who were involved in the study. All participant responses to the interviews were number coded so that respondents and their identities remained anonymous. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to help the reader distinguish the difference between general and special education teachers and their responses during the interview process.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

	Gender	Teaching experience (years)	Teaching experience in inclusion	General education teacher	Special education teacher
Jan	Female	25	14	x	
Marsha	Female	20	8		x
Cindy	Female	17	6	x	
Carol	Female	13	3	x	
Alice	Female	5	2	x	
Bobby	Male	15	12		x
Greg	Male	9	5	x	
Sandy	Female	12	2		x
Peter	Male	6	6		x
Erica	Female	7	5		x

Educators Interviewed

Jan is a general education teacher in the area of language arts. She has been a teacher for 25 years. This participant teaches two inclusion classes a day for one grade level. Jan has been teaching in the inclusive setting for 14 years.

Marsha is a special education teacher in the area of language arts. She has been teaching for 20 years. Marsha teaches two inclusive classes or one grade level per day. Marsha has been teaching in the inclusive environment for 8 years.

Cindy is a general education teacher in the area of language arts who has been teaching for 17 years. Cindy has worked in the inclusive setting for 8 years. She teaches three inclusive classes in two grade levels per day.

Carol is a general education teacher. She has taught social studies for 13 years and has worked in the inclusive environment for 3 years. Cindy currently teaches one class that utilizes the inclusive model for one grade level.

Alice is a general education language arts teacher who has been teaching for 5 years. She has had 2 years of teaching in the inclusive setting. Alice teaches one inclusive class per day for one grade level.

Bobby is a special education teacher. This participant has been teaching for 15 years. During his years as a special education teacher, he has taught social studies and language arts. He has worked in the inclusive environment for 12 years. He currently teaches two classes per day in one grade level that uses the inclusive model.

Greg is a general education teacher. This participant has 9 years of teaching experience in the area of mathematics. Greg has taught in the inclusive environment for 5 years and teaches two classes per day in one grade level that uses the inclusive model.

Sandy is a special education teach who has 12 years of teaching experience in mathematics and science. Sandy has worked in the inclusive setting for 2 years. This participant currently teaches two classes in one grade level that use the inclusive model per day.

Peter is a special education teacher. He has 6 years of teaching experience in language arts and social studies. He has taught in inclusive environments since he started teaching 6 years ago and currently teaches one period in one grade level that uses the inclusive model.

Erica is a special education teacher with 7 years of teaching experience. This participant teaches mathematics and has spent 5 years teaching in classes that use the inclusive model. Erica currently teaches one class that uses the inclusive model for one grade level per day.

Data Collection

During the data collection process, I conducted face-to-face individual semistructured interviews from September, 2016, through October, 2016. The interviews were with 10 general and special education teachers experienced with the inclusive environment. Initial criterion sampling was used to ensure that the 10 knowledgeable participants had experience with teaching in inclusive environments. The participants reviewed and signed the informed consent document. The information on the consent form emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary and would be kept confidential and anonymous. Each participant was contacted by email or in person to schedule their interview. The participants each selected the time and location that was most comfortable and convenient for their schedule to complete the interview. Interview

locations included the study site computer lab and library. Times for the interviews included during the school day and after school.

When the participants arrived to each interview location, I engaged in an informal conversation to create a comfortable mood and encourage honesty and openness during the interviews. I reminded each participant about the interviewee's right to leave the study at any time, and provided a reminder that the interview would be audio recorded and transcribed. Before the start of each interview, I checked the digital recording device to ensure that it worked properly. Each of the participants were provided with a copy of the research questions to refer to during the interview. The individual interviews took between 45 and 60 minutes. An interview protocol with 14 questions was used during each interview to ensure that each topic was fully addressed (see Appendix A). At the conclusion of each interview, I reviewed the recording several times before I started transcribing the information. After I transcribed the interviews, each participant was e-mailed a copy of their interview transcript to verify if it was an accurate reflection of the recording. None of the participants noted any changes that needed to be made to the transcribed interviews upon completion of their individual review. Next, member checking was utilized to validate the accuracy and interpretation of the participant's responses to the interview questions. I completed this process by providing the findings of the one-on-one interviews to each participant. I requested that the participants review the findings and determine if those findings were an accurate reflection of their perceptions of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusion environments. Additionally, the participants were given the opportunity to provide any

information related to their responses. The participants supported and approved the findings, and therefore no changes were made to the data.

Recording and Tracking the Data

Each of the interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. A number was assigned to each recorded interview to maintain confidentiality. I transcribed all the data word for word within one day of each interview using HyperResearch software and transferred the information to Microsoft Word for further analysis. HyperResearch software allowed me to alter the speed of the recorded interviews as I transcribed the responses word for word. The software allowed me to pause and replay the responses as often as I needed in order to ensure that I wrote the information down accurately. After I transcribed the interviews to a Word document, HyperResearch software was no longer used in the data analysis process. Transcribing the data within 24 hours of each interview was important to maintain accuracy of the data (Spring, 2012). I reviewed the transcription and the audio recording simultaneously multiple times after the transcription in order to gain a deep and complete understanding of the responses. All documents were saved on a password protected flash drive and all identifying information was deleted. I placed all the data in a locked safe in my home office to maintain confidentiality of the participants and the data. The data will remain locked in the safe for five years and will then be destroyed.

When transcribing the interviews, the process including uploading the audio recording to HyperResearch, typing the interviews word for word after listening to the recordings, taking time to examine the data and gain an understanding that helped determine emerging patterns. I did not continue to use HyperReseach at this point. I

transferred all of the data to Microsoft Word and proceeded to analyze the data in this format. I looked to discover patterns and trends that emerged from the data collected based on the literature reviewed for this study that was related to teachers' perception towards professional development beneficial for inclusion at a public middle school in southern rural Georgia. To assist with the coding process, I used multicolored high lighters to note phrases, words, or ideas that were consistently repeated during the interview process. During the open coping process, I formed phrase or word patterns that described the meaning of a particular text. I wrote the phrases and words on each page of the transcripts to correctly identify possible emerging themes. The next stage of the data analysis process involved selective coding. Selective coding was used to arrive at the results and assist me as I organize themes and categorize and identify central ideas from the data (Creswell 2003, p. 191, 2009, p.437; Merriam, 2009, p. 149). During this process, I read and reread the transcripts and selectively coded any data that related to the core variables identified in the participant responses using words and phrases that appeared frequently (Merriam, 2009). I reviewed the data looking for themes and categorized the data. The patterns or common themes that emerged were organized and used in the final report.

Findings

For this qualitative case study, I used 14 semistructured one-on-one interviews (Appendix A). Each participant was a general education or special education teacher who had experience teaching in the inclusive environment. During each of the interviews, I used specific questions to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions of the types of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusive environments.

After reviewing the emerging themes for each interview question, the elements were organized into major themes. More than 20 expressions were categorized. Key phrases and sentences were pulled from the interview questions and analyzed for commonalities. The data revealed many similarities and patterns in response from the participants (see Table 2).

As depicted on Table 2, the general education teachers' responses to the interview questions varied but correlated in several areas. The biggest concern for the general education teachers was inadequate common planning time to prepare to teach students with disabilities. Based on the finding from the data analysis, four distinct themes emerged that represented the perceptions shared by the participants. These were the following: (a) inadequate common planning time, (b) inadequate training on teaching strategies, (c) professional development for implementing IEPs, and (d) professional development for new teachers who teach in inclusion. The themes were used to form a description of the meaning and essences of the experiences of each participant. The participant's individual descriptions of the perceptions are the focus of the next section. The names of each participant were change to protect their privacy and to help maintain anonymity.

Table 3

Interview Questions Responses and Emerging Themes

Interview questions	Key phrases and sentences	Emerging themes
IQ1:	Teaching strategies for inclusion; new teacher training; IEPs	Inclusion teaching strategies; new teacher training; IEPs
IQ2:	Common planning; teaching methods;	Common planning; teaching methods
IQ3:	Once or twice a month; One course in undergrad; Two 20 minutes sessions	Various professional development experience
IQ4:	Using IEPs; teaching strategies;	IEP' strategies for teaching students with disabilities
IQ5:	Increase student performance; increase new teacher knowledge	Teaching methods allow time for collaboration
IQ6:	One training for co-teaching; one course in undergrad; one class	One day of training One course Varied amounts of training
IQ7:	One 20 minute session a month; time for teachers to collaborate	Regular sessions; time for collaboration with teachers
IQ8:	Understanding IEPs; effective teaching strategies; coteaching techniques	Understand IEPs; effective teaching Strategies
IQ9:	Station teaching; parallel teaching; team teaching; small group teaching	Coteaching models (3)
IQ10:	New teacher training; adequate planning; strategies for inclusion	Time to plan; multiple teaching strategies
IQ11:	Curriculum planning; assessment implementation	Two sessions for general and special educators
IQ12:	Exposure to three co-teaching models; learned station and team teaching;	Effectively implemented 3 coteaching models
IQ13:	Train new teachers; time to plan; training for general educators	New teacher training; adequate planning time; instructional strategies
IQ14:	None shared	

Themes

The results addressed the main point of each research question used to guide this study. Themes were derived using statements made by the participants during the interviews. All responses represent perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and thoughts of the educators interviewed and their educational experiences in the inclusive environments. The themes that emerged from the data were adequate time for common planning for general and special educators, teaching strategies for inclusion, training about individualized education plans and professional development for new teachers.

Adequate Time for Common Planning for General and Special Educators

Cindy, Carol and Greg expressed that they have minimal time to collaborate with special education teachers and feel unprepared to teach students with disabilities in the inclusion environment. According to Cindy, Bobby, Sandy, Carol, and Erica, although teachers do share a scheduled time for planning each week, little of that time is dedicated to collaboration among teachers. Instead that time is used to address operational concerns. Due to this lack of planning, general education teachers are left to make plans for instructional strategies and behavior management without consulting the special education teacher for information on best practice to incorporate to meet the needs of the students (Sarancho, 2011). This also leads to less time for general and special education teachers to create accommodations for students with disabilities which results in special education students not being able to fully participate in the learning experience for some lessons (Trehearn, 2010). Additionally, Peter, Sandy, Alice, and Jan expressed concern about not having the time to collaborate to prepare for projects and discuss concerns that arise as class is conducted each day. Teachers must be provided the time to prepare

engaging lessons, make accommodations to assignments, and to discuss concerns throughout the instructional day (Trehearn, 2010).

According to Jan, Marsha, Erica, and Peter, it was not a common practice for teachers who worked in inclusion environments to have a common planning time, which contributed to the lack of time for general education and special education teachers to collaborate. Bobby, Greg, and Sandy expressed that common planning time was needed to review data and discuss best practices to use in the classroom. Carol expressed that some of the special education teachers were not familiar with the curriculum modifications for the current school year and that this issue could be addressed during common planning so that instruction would not have to be interrupted or delayed. Jan, Marsha, Bobby, Erica, and Carol also stated that common planning is essential when teaching in inclusion environments. Alice suggested that department chairs, counselors, and administrators work together to create the master schedule to ensure that teachers of inclusion share common planning so that time is allotted to effectively plan lessons and collaborate on best practices for inclusion. Bobby and Cindy indicated that collaborative planning among general and special education teachers would be essential to implement successful inclusion environments. Bobby expressed that collaboration among teachers is paramount for working in inclusion. He felt that if teachers do not have the opportunity to plan together, it can hinder the learning process for the students. Bobby expressed a need to be prepared before co-teaching and shared that common planning provides that opportunity. Cindy also felt that working in inclusion classroom requires a lot of planning and noted that it has to be done together so that both teachers share responsibility for teaching. Bobby, a special education teacher felt that common planning was not as

important for inclusion environments. The special education teachers felt that general education teachers should be able to read and understand Individualized Education Plans and make the needed instructional modifications and accommodations for lessons and activities for students with disabilities. General education teachers Jan and Marsha shared that they were equally responsible for the success of all students and did not state a difference in the roles of general education teachers and special education teachers. Special education teachers Sandy and Erica also suggested that new teachers who were unfamiliar with best practices for working in inclusion environments seek out individual professional development outside of school if they felt they needed additional support.

Teaching Strategies for Inclusion

In order to implement balanced learning opportunities for students with disabilities in the general education environment, educators stated that they felt they needed additional professional development on instructional strategies to use in inclusion. Jan explained that as an experienced teacher, she has had the opportunity to engage in various professional development opportunities related to instructional strategies; however, there was very little training in best practices for teaching methods to use in inclusion embedded in the training. Marsha shared that she has attended various professional development sessions as a special education teacher that she feels general education teachers should be involved in to learn best practices for teaching in inclusion. She felt that the general education teachers that she collaborated with over the last several years have not been exposed to various teaching techniques to use in the inclusive classroom, and she suggested that be included in professional development with special education teachers in the future to develop proficiency in inclusive teaching strategies.

Bobby felt that there was a need for more training for general education teachers on how to break down information for students with disabilities. Bobby maintained that students with disabilities could be successful in general education settings if all the components are in place before they enter the classroom with teachers including strategies to accommodate students with various needs, understanding the IEP plans, effective lessons, small group instruction, and station teaching to name a few. Peter and Alice felt that general and special education teachers still need more support for teaching methods to use other than station teaching to be on one accord. Alice feels that special education is a needed service and supports inclusion; however, she claimed that she did not feel qualified to serve some of the students who show a propensity towards the inclusion model. She stated that she spends most of her time researching teaching strategies on her own to ensure that the special education students are performing on a comparable level as the general education students in the setting. Greg stated that initially his chief concern was not feeling prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities as well as his other students. He stated that in some regard, he is not qualified to teach inclusion since he does not have a special education degree or certification. He argued that if students need to be included in a regular education setting, the class should be taught by someone with a special education degree and content knowledge to create an environment that is suitable for all learners.

Although all of the teachers have participated in some form of professional development related to teaching in inclusion environments, many of their responses reflected the need for additional training to take place for both special education and general education teachers. The responses also indicated that special education teachers

had more professional development opportunities for inclusion, while the general education teachers had varying amounts of training. Nevertheless, all involved felt that more professional development was significant for those who work in inclusion environments.

Training about Individualized Education Plans

While examining the professional development needs for general and special education teachers who teach in inclusion, teachers expressed concerns about their lack of training in understanding and implementing Individualized Education Plans. Sandy shared that she had little training for inclusion, and felt that there should be additional professional development offered for implementing student IEPs. Greg explained that he has learned how to read IEPs, but each one is unique and comes with a variety of accommodations and modifications because they are written for individual students. Greg shared that he uses the IEP as a guide since he is not a special education teacher, but often asks his co-teacher for their input. He stated that more training is needed in this area of inclusion so that he can implement the plan effectively as a general education teacher and not have to rely on my co-teacher so much. Marsha explained that experienced teachers spend a lot of time teaching new teachers about accommodations and modifications in the IEP. She believed these teachers need to attend professional development before they start teaching so that they can be ready to put the student's plans in place on day one. According to Marsha, it often takes new general education teachers a long time to understand the information in an IEP and that means that students with disabilities are not being served at the highest levels from the start of the school year which is unfair to them. Peter noted that general education teachers need to be more

comfortable with how to modify tasks in the co-teaching setting while Bobby expressed that special education teachers spend too much time modifying assignments for students with disabilities because general education teachers do not understand how to do it. Bobby stated that general and special education teachers need to attend training on writing and using IEPs together so that both parties understand the content of the plan. Erica state that she communicates daily with the general education teacher either before or after school to discuss the IEP to guarantee the teacher understands how accommodations and modifications should be implemented with students before assignments are given. She wants to make sure that she is meeting the needs of all students and make changes when they are needed to create a successful experience for students with disabilities in the inclusion environment. Peter stated that it is a lot of work for general education teachers to read an IEP and modify lessons without any training from the district. He reported that many general educators that he has taught with have in the inclusive environment expressed frustration over the lack of support from the district regarding IEPs. Alice stated that her main concern was making sure that she was prepared to implement the information given in the IEP. She believes that general education teachers have to heavily rely on special education teachers until additional training is provided on how to use the student IEP correctly in instructional planning. Alice shared that she communicates with special education teachers, counselors, and administrators regularly to ask for new ideas to help her students. Alice also expressed that it is a struggle for her to keep up with the paperwork and documentation related to the IEP and was concerned about the accessibility of information in the IEP for general education teachers since they are not involved in the creation of the education plan for the

students. The five special education teachers who participated in the study all suggested that new teachers undergo professional development related to understanding and implementing IEPs prior to teaching in the inclusive environment to effectively apply goals, modifications, and accommodations put into place by the special education teacher.

Professional Development for New Teachers

Of the 10 teachers who responded in regards to the professional development needs for teaching in inclusion environments, Jan felt that new teachers were prepared to teach in an inclusion classroom with the minimal professional development they had received prior to teaching. Peter, Alice, and Carol expressed that they did not feel that new teachers had received enough professional development or education to prepare them for teaching in the inclusion setting. Some new teachers referred to their professional development or education courses for working in inclusion as not providing them with enough knowledge and skills in preparation for teaching in inclusion. Peter stated that he felt like the professional development he received was a review of the basics for special education and that he has picked up his teaching skills over the course of his career. He stated that working with a general education teacher who was experienced in inclusion helped him develop his teaching practices for working in special education. Alice explained that the course work that she completed in her master's program prepared her for teaching the content, however, it did not provide her with the extensive information on working with students with disabilities that she needed like modifying assignments, implementing the IEP effectively, and how to manage a classroom of students with various learning and behavioral disabilities. Carol noted that

she had a few years of experience in the co-teaching setting and did not feel that she was always able to meet the needs of the students in the inclusion classroom two years ago. Carol sought out professional development on differentiated instruction and co-teaching models like station teaching and team teaching to better meet the needs of my students. At this point, I am much more aware of how to work with all students, but still feels that all new teachers regardless of being a general education teacher or special education teacher need more professional development before they enter an inclusion classroom.

Peter, Carol, Greg and Jan spoke about the importance of professional development and having a strong knowledgebase for working in inclusion settings. The teachers felt that effective professional development was essential to the success of the teachers and the students in these classes. Peter, Carol, Greg and Jan also expressed that proper training for co teaching would be beneficial to both veteran and new teachers who work in the inclusion settings. Jan shared that with proper training, both teachers would be aware of the roles and procedures needed to lead in the inclusion classroom, thus creating a shared workload. Most teachers felt that there was a need for continued professional development for new teachers.

Answers to Research Questions

RQ: What types of professional development do general and special education teachers need when teaching in inclusive environments?

The findings revealed that general and special education teachers need professional development in four areas. Based on the data analysis, four key themes emerged. The four themes were: adequate time for collaboration with general and special education teachers, teaching strategies for inclusion, training about individualized

education plans, and professional development for new teachers. The main theme was that most general and special education teachers felt they were allotted inadequate time for common planning to collaborate with one another. Most teachers showed positive thoughts about teaching in inclusion classrooms but felt that they needed more time to collaborate with co-teaching partners to prepare for lesson, modify assignments and effectively implement IEPs. Jan shared that common planning time should be made sacred for those who teach in inclusion settings and that operational information that is often disseminated during this time should be delivered in another format or meeting during the instructional day. Teachers also expressed that common planning should be taken into consideration by counselors, administrators and department chairs when completing the master schedule to ensure that co-teachers are afforded the opportunity to plan together. Jan stated,

> Common planning should be made sacred. It is not a time for operational and administrative tasks to be addressed. Common planning should be dedicated to professional development, data analysis or instructional planning and collaborative discussions that increase best practices for new and veteran teachers. Administrators must take this into consideration.

SQ1: What are the professional development needs identified by general education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

The findings from the analyzed data were minimal as to what are the identified professional development needs for general and special education teachers. The next theme that emerged from the data analysis was inadequate professional development for teaching strategies for inclusion. Six of the teachers reported not having enough training

on differentiated instruction methods for teaching in inclusion. They believed that possessing these types of strategies are integral for successful teaching inclusion. For example, one teacher stated that station teaching was a very effective co-teaching method, but it is one that is used in every class several times a week and that teachers need more training on techniques to use in inclusion classes to foster engagement for learning. Two general education teachers also expressed that they did not feel qualified to teach in inclusion because they did not have a strong background in methods for teaching content related material with students with disabilities.

I could not identify any particular professional development need because of the short range of responses; however, differentiated instruction and strategies for teaching in inclusion were mentioned several times during the interviews. Alice said,

> The course work that I completed in my master's program prepared me for teaching the content, however, it did not provide me with the extensive information on working with students with disabilities that I needed like modifying assignments, implementing the IEP effectively, and how to manage a classroom of students with various learning and behavioral disabilities. I have had to learn as I go, and it has been a challenge to do so.

SQ2:What are the professional development needs identified by special education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

One theme to emerge was that of professional development for new teachers. Participants suggested that teachers lack of training and professional development related to inclusion, special education teaching strategies, and content related professional development made implementing inclusion difficult. Lee (2013) asserted that no matter

how many education courses received at the university level, teachers still fail to implement it once in the teaching environment. Erica explained that only a few courses are gives in college at the undergraduate level and they are an overview. Once working, professional development trainings are available, but do not review content specific material that special education teachers may need. Three of the participants, Marsha, Cindy, and Carol reported that since becoming certified teachers, they have received no more than two or three short professional development related to inclusion and core content material. The special education teachers described the professional development as insufficient and uninformative. According to another Sandy, the professional development sessions were used to provide information about inclusion, but they did not disseminate ideas relevant to instructional strategies and best practices pertinent to my instruction. Five participants, Jan, Cindy, Carol, Alice, and Greg stated they had received no inclusion professional development training regarding specific disabilities, IEP development and implementation, and specific models to use in inclusion other than station teaching.

Peter suggested that for inclusion to be effective, joint professional development training with special education teachers and general education teachers were needed. According to Peter, general and special education teachers attending professional development together will allow them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, create engaging and effective learning activities, and find ways to work together that promotes student academic success. Another special education teacher, Erica suggested that all teachers need to be involved in professional development that teaches hands-on activities, content specific strategies for inclusion, and relevant methods for reaching students with

disabilities. Sandy also suggested that teachers need to attend professional development training to see how they can customize inclusion practices and include differentiated instruction into their own personal style of teaching. This belief aligned with those who suggested that teachers needed training on teaching strategies, assessments, and principles of co-teaching and what co-teaching looks like in the classroom. Sandy stated,

> Although we have all attended professional development related to inclusion, much of the information shared in the training sessions is an overview of what inclusion is and no information is disseminated to us to take back to the classroom to implement in areas relevant to instructional strategies and best practices pertinent to my instruction and the lessons that I will actually use in the classroom.

SQ3: How might professional development be used to improve the current inclusion programs?

Based on the data, the themes of professional development for new teachers, training about individualized education plans, and teaching strategies for inclusion emerged regarding research question SQ3. Professional development has been portrayed in the literature review as the practice that may be able to improve inclusion programs. As indicated in the literature review, professional development has a number of benefits which would encourage more success in inclusion environments. Each of the participants provided responses that indicate that professional development is essential for effective inclusion programs. According to Cindy, the more experience she gained and the more professional development she engaged in the more confident she became in providing instruction for inclusion. Cindy asserted that teachers feel more empowered and

comfortable in an inclusion setting if they are knowledgeable about methods for teaching in inclusion. Relevant training increases teacher motivation and the likelihood of knowledge being implemented in classrooms will increase (Knight, 2009). Jan maintained that if teachers were better trained and felt more comfortable with students with disabilities, they would do a better job at implementing inclusion. She shared that gaining knowledge regarding the importance of inclusion would build a greater capacity for teachers to meet the needs of all students in the inclusive environment.

Carol suggested that professional development might improve the current inclusion program by providing teachers with current strategies to use with students in inclusion classroom which would lead to student academic success. She also believed that professional development training might help improve inclusion programs because they strengthen teacher's knowledge of specific subject matter, provide the opportunity for collaboration, and give teachers better tools for understanding specific learning and behavioral disabilities which are key components to successful inclusion programs. Three of the participants also shared that professional development would help improve inclusion by providing teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide instruction and meet the needs of students with disabilities. This in turn results in an improved sense of efficacy and attitudes towards their abilities when working in inclusion (Allison, 2011). Every participant indicated that student growth was the biggest advantage to receiving professional development for inclusion. Greg asserted that students with disabilities would achieve much more if their teachers were properly prepared to accommodate their abilities in the general education setting. Three teachers expressed that the professional development helps to improve inclusion programs

because it allows for shared responsibilities, time for common collaborative planning efforts between general and special education teachers, and allow for understanding on how teachers should tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual learners. Five participants suggested that inclusion programs would be improved through the incorporation of professional development because teachers would be become highly effective in inclusion practices such as implementing the co-teaching models, modifying assignments and implementing IEPs, using classroom management skills to monitor unwanted behaviors in the classroom, and providing clarification on how co-teaching actually works. Carol said,

> Ultimately, I believe professional development might improve the current inclusion program by providing us with current strategies to use with students in inclusion classroom which would lead to student academic success. Without these tools teachers cannot meet the needs of the diverse group of children that walk into our classrooms and that is not what any of us signed up for. Teacher must have professional development that arm them with the most effective, research-based teaching strategies that will encourage success in our classrooms. This is the only way our kids will achieve academic success.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I used notes and member checking to establish trustworthiness. I took notes throughout the study which detailed how data were collected and how I arrives at the theme and categories. Additionally, I did member checking as outlined by Merriam (2009). After each interview was transcribed and interpreted, I asked the participants to review and comment on a summary of their statements. A summary of the findings were

shared with the participants to review to ensure that the information from each interview was accurately represented in the findings. There were no discrepancies reported. Additionally, after I reviewed the transcribed data I modified my use of acronyms in the transcripts that may be known by only the general education and special education teachers. I occasionally spell out the words and added them to my list of operational terms for the study. It is important to note that I personally collected the data and analyzed it utilizing strategies presented in the literatures.

Discrepant Cases

In this qualitative case study, all the participants provided detailed evidence to describe the types of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusion environments. However, in some cases the perspective can differ and be contradictory. Creswell (2003), noted contrary information adds to the credibility to research because it is important to present data that is contradictory to the themes. During this study, some data did not support the need for professional development specific to inclusion for special education teachers. For example, Peter believed that general education teachers needed more professional development regarding teaching strategies for inclusion but found that special education teachers were equipped to server students with disabilities. Peter also described his feelings as often concerned for new general education teachers who are placed in inclusion classrooms with no experience for teaching students with disabilities. It is challenging to start a new career and manage all the demands for teaching in inclusion and meeting the needs of all students. Peter suggested that new teachers be required to attend professional development specific to inclusion prior to

entering this teaching setting or that new teachers have a minimum of three years of successful teaching before being assigned to teach in inclusion.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore and describe the perceptions of 10 general and special education teachers about the types of professional development that is beneficial for teaching in inclusion environments. The findings revealed that both general and special education teachers need additional professional development on teaching strategies to use in inclusive environments. They also believed that all teachers needed professional development for understanding and implementing individualized education plans (IEPs), and that new teachers needed professional development for teaching in inclusion. A number of teachers expressed the need for adequate time for common planning with general and special education teachers in order to collaborate on best practices to use in co-teaching classrooms. They believed that operational information should be presented at a time other than common planning to avoid hindering student success.

Section 5 concludes this study with an interpretation of the findings presented from the literature review, limitations, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Inclusion is an educational practice that is mandated though LRE in public school classrooms. The ability to provide effective instructional and emotional support to students with disabilities in the general education setting is an essential component of inclusion. Furthermore, the need to prepare educators for including students with disabilities in general education classrooms continues to increase (Hargrove, 2010). In many schools, general and special education teachers lack the training for teaching students with disabilities in the general education environment. General and special education teachers' preparation to teach students with disabilities is essential for successful implementation of inclusion (Singh, P. & Glasswell, K. (2013).

Due to the implementation of inclusion, it is important for schools to provide beneficial professional development for both general and special education teachers assigned to inclusion classrooms (Singh, 2007). The practice of inclusion requires well trained and knowledgeable special and general education teachers who are capable of meeting the various needs in a diverse classroom environment.

In this study, I described the perceptions of general and special education teachers regarding the types of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusion in a middle school located in South Georgia. The school where the inclusion model is used provided the appropriate platform for implementing this study. The data collected in this study derived from one research question and three subquestions:

RQ: What types of professional development do general and special education teachers need when teaching in inclusive environments?

SQ1: What are the professional development needs identified by general education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

SQ2: What are the professional development needs identified by special education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?

SQ3: How might professional development be used to improve the current inclusion programs?

I used teacher interviews to identify the types of professional development that is beneficial for teaching in inclusion. Interview questions that were used to address each research question can be found along with these in Appendix A.

Teacher perceptions were gathered through a series of interviews focused on the lived experiences of the teachers and the type and quality of professional development offered for teaching in an inclusion model. Hatch (2002) noted that researchers often utilize qualitative research to describe parts of a culture from the point of view of insiders to the culture. This study explored general and special education teachers' perceptions of the types of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusion. Four themes emerged from the categories for this study: (a) adequate time for common planning for general and special education teachers, (b) teaching strategies for inclusion, (c) training for implementing IEPs, and (d) professional development for new teachers. The study found that a combination of these elements assisted in determining the outcome of an inclusion program that is effectively implemented. Data was collected, analyzed and coded for the use of building recommendations that may be used to assist in the professional development and training for general and special education teachers who work in inclusion environments.

Summary of Findings

In this study, general and special education teachers described their perceptions of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusion. Through this study, a description and clear understanding of beneficial professional development for teaching in inclusion emerged from the participants. The teachers described how they perceived and experienced the professional development they have received to teach in inclusion. Most participants believed there was a need for common planning to take place that includes the opportunity for relevant professional development for both special and general education teachers simultaneously. Teachers acknowledged and understood that there was a need for additional professional development for teaching in inclusion that addressed content specific strategies for inclusion as well as training regarding understanding and implementing student individualized education plans. Participants also asserted the need for professional development for new teachers entering education who would be charged with teaching in inclusive environments. For example, Erica stated that new teachers should have the opportunity to engage in professional development for inclusion prior to entering the inclusive classroom to clearly understand how to plan academic lessons that promote equity and success for students with and without disabilities. Erica also suggested that new general education teachers have professional development on writing lessons that incorporate accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities so that they do not have to rely solely on special education teachers for to do so.

According to the data, the teachers believed that a variety of professional development is needed for teaching in inclusion environments. Participants expressed the

importance of professional development and gave examples of the specific needs that exist within the school. Eight of the participants stated that there is a need for training on the six models of coteaching as described by Friend (2013). These models include: (a) one teach or lead, one support (observe); (b) station teaching; (c) parallel teaching; (d) alternative teaching; (e) team teaching. The participants made concerted efforts for engaging in professional development to better equip themselves with skills and knowledge for teaching in inclusion classrooms. For example, Marsha described how she spends time each year helping new teachers understand and implement IEPs. She also expressed that teachers should have some preparation for working in inclusion classrooms prior to starting their careers in cotaught environments. The teachers expressed a common belief that professional development is a positive and necessary part of effective and successful inclusionary classrooms.

Teachers' understanding of beneficial professional development related to their knowledge and preparation for inclusion. Dufour (2008) reported that teachers must have the belief that creating a learning environment that offers differentiated instruction and effective teaching strategies will create options for all students and that teaching strategies specific to inclusion must occur on a regular basis. Strategies for teaching in inclusion must be research based and promote equity. Teaching strategies should incorporate specially designed instruction and supplementary aids and services to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students. Teachers should be able to implement multiple models of coteaching, flexible grouping, tiered tasks, scaffold lessons, implement one-on-one instruction, and manage behaviors in an inclusion classroom. Students in inclusion classrooms should access information differently and

use a variety of teaching methods to present content. Textbooks, lecturing, and notes should be replaced with movement, music, pictures, charts, and technology in inclusion classrooms to promote engagement and creativity. Students are less likely to learn in inclusive settings that incorporate traditional teaching methods, thus teachers must be knowledgeable in relevant teaching strategies for inclusion. The current educational system encourages an inclusionary setting for students with disabilities mandated by federal laws; therefore, teachers must diversify their assessments, instructional practices, and training to meet the needs of the various needs of today's student.

I found the need for teachers to have adequate time for common planning for professional development during the school day. Participants stated that they do have common planning time each week; however, it is often used to redeliver district mandate, review testing information, or discuss operational concerns about the school rather than engaging in professional development. The participants also said they often plan to meet before or after school to prepare for lessons and discuss classroom concerns because there is time set aside in the school day for this to take place. According to the data, teachers felt they needed more time for planning well-developed lessons, reviewing IEPs, and learning teaching strategies. For example, Bobby addressed the need for common planning time with his coteacher to prepare for teaching content and sharing teaching responsibilities before starting new lessons. Alice also suggested that common planning be used for professional development for general education teachers who need training for inclusion. This is important for success in inclusion programs for both general and special education teachers.

From the findings of the study, professional development for implementing individualized education plans was evident in all the data. The need for understanding how the process used for writing, revising and implementing student IEPs was a reoccurring concern. For instance, Greg expressed that general education teachers spend a large amount of time reading paperwork that they are unfamiliar with when they are assigned students with disabilities. He stated that more time should be spent on planning, incorporating appropriate teaching methods for students with disabilities, and addressing instructional needs. New general education teachers are expected to implement the accommodations in an IEP with little or no professional development on how to read and understand the document. Sandy felt that her lack of professional development for inclusion could affect her classroom practices. "As a new inclusion teacher, I am concerned about having what it takes to properly service all of my students at times. I would like to be ready to give them everything that they need to reach mastery in my class." Mastin (2010) noted that as a whole, general education teachers are not professionally trained in the management and implementation on a wide range of components for inclusion that are pertinent to meeting the needs of students with various disabilities. A lack of knowledge related to individualized education plans for students with disabilities in inclusion environments can negatively impact the learning outcomes for students.

According to the data, professional development for new teachers appeared to be critical for effective inclusion programs. General education teachers who were new to working in inclusion shared concerns centering on their lack of training and qualifications to teach students with disabilities. For example, Sandy said, "I am not properly trained on

different methods to use for inclusion. I have used station teaching weekly, but differentiation for inclusion is not my strength. I have not been fully trained on the different disabilities, and I feel I need to be certain that I am able to give my students what they need." A lack of understanding among general educators of the needs of students with various disabilities, insufficient resources, and lack of time and inadequate training are barriers that general education teachers face in inclusive settings, (Mastin, 2010). The participants suggested that new teachers need professional development prior to entering the inclusion classroom. The educators noted the need for training in implementing accommodations, differentiated teaching strategies for inclusion, various coteaching models and classroom management. A common idea shared among the participants was that general education teachers needed more time to spend preparing for instructional activities and for becoming familiar with the disabilities of the students present in their classrooms. Many general and special education teachers in this study supported the concept of professional development for new teachers.

Link to Conceptual Framework

The literature and findings of this study indicate that general and special education teachers play a critical role in determining the success or failure of inclusion programs, which involves their beliefs about their personal efficacy. Understanding the relationship between general and special education teachers' efficacy beliefs to instruct and manage and inclusive environment and their perceptions of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusion is important to the success of inclusion programs. Bandura's social cognitive theory affirmed that one's efficacy influences the decisions that people make as well as the effort and perseverance they use to engage in tasks,

(Bandura, 1997). The main element is that teachers' efficacy is related to their instructional practices and their approaches towards the educational process. Teachers must possess a positive attitude and be dedicated to teaching students with disabilities. Teacher must believe that their actions can impact students with disabilities. They must also recognize they have the ability to make decisions which will affect their role and the students' performance (Hargrove, 2010). As present in the findings of this study, many teachers found themselves lacking time for common planning, needing support in teaching strategies for inclusion and implementing IEPs, and new teachers lacking professional development. Bandura (1997) observed that eventually, their low sense of efficacy to fulfill these academic demands can create a stressful outcome.

Friend and Cook (2009) claimed that teacher's perceptions of inclusion affected their performance, and that teacher who receive training that exposed them to special educational techniques and inclusion practices developed improved attitudes regarding inclusion. Inclusion is a situation that may include difficult aspects that test an educator's self-efficacy. Research has connected effective professional development to positive attitudes towards inclusion which may reflect Bandura's description of mastery, which is an element of self-efficacy. It is not logical to conclude that if teachers were provided with only basic training for teaching in inclusion, that their perceptions towards professional development would automatically result in improved professional development opportunities for general and special education teachers who teach in inclusion (Lee, 2011).

Five general education teachers and 4 special education teachers in this study expressed the need for additional professional development that is beneficial for teaching

in inclusion environments. The findings indicated that the teacher's beliefs and perceived effectiveness was largely influenced by inadequate professional development for inclusion. Bandura's theory suggested that when general and special education teacher's perceptions of themselves and their abilities can be altered, there is a likelihood that the educators will perceive themselves in a more positive light and be able to effectively implement inclusion.

Limitations to the Study

Based on the results of the present study, recommendations for further research supported in the literature reviewed are given. Additionally, this section present recommendations for improving professional development for teachers of inclusion. The recommendations are organized around the main themes emerging from the teacher responses. The following are recommended:

- Provide all general and special education teachers with appropriate professional development in strategies for teaching in inclusion environments to meet the needs of all learners (Friend, 2009). This recommendation will require attention to implementing all the models of co-teaching as described by Friend (2009).
- Provide general and special education teachers ample time for common planning to attend on site professional development related to inclusionary practices, develop assessments and activities with multiple teaching strategies, and lesson planning for inclusion.

- Provide new general education teachers with professional development opportunities specific for teaching in inclusive settings and working with students with various disabilities.
- Provide general education teachers professional development specific to understanding and implementing individualized education plans. This recommendation requires attention to understanding accommodations and modifications included in student IEPs.

The incorporation of professional development beneficial for teaching in inclusion is essential to improving inclusionary programs. For this reason, additional research is needed to address how to improve professional development opportunities. The goal is to find ways to improve academic success for all learners which includes students with disabilities. Additionally, inadequate professional development resources to implement inclusion was a concern for teachers. More research is needed that involves interviews and classroom observations to develop teaching strategies for improving inclusive environments.

Recommendations for Further Study

It is also critical that further studies be done that focus on professional development for students with specific learning and cognitive disabilities. This will provide an understanding of how well teachers are prepared to serve students with disabilities in the general education environment. A final suggestion for further research would be an exploration of how administrators feel regarding professional development for new teachers who are assigned to teach in inclusive environments.

Implications

Equal education for all is viewed as a powerful tool for social change that can merge various sections of society that would otherwise never meet. Provisions for the education of students with disabilities form a major part of the education system in the United State. This study provided a detailed account from the lived experiences of general and special education teachers who teach in inclusive settings. The information gained in this study will help to improve professional development which will help to improve the educational experience for students. The IDEA legislation requires states to development and implement polices to ensure a free and appropriate public education to all children with disabilities.

Even though it is important to ensure education for all children, teachers are still faced with the challenged of ensuring they are appropriately prepared to teach students with disabilities in the general education setting. Positive social change will be realized when general and special education teacher are provided with the necessary support from all stakeholders in regards to teacher training and professional development. It is understood that inclusion supports social justice and helps to improve the perceptions that are often impressed upon students with disabilities. Educating students with disabilities within the general education setting signifies those with disabilities are not only members of the classroom environment but are also valuable members of society who can provide important contributions. The practice of inclusion should not be the sole responsibility of general and special education teachers, but it should be a shared task that administrators, parents, and community stakeholders take part in. Social change will be achieved for the good of all when teachers are knowledgeable and well equipped to teach in inclusion and

when students with disabilities can be successfully included in academic, social, and athletic activities with their peers.

When this study is approved for publishing, the goal is to share the findings with local school districts in a professional development session. Professional development in my school and district will provide me with the opportunity to discuss the findings and answer questions from the study. Teacher workshops help throughout new teacher orientation during pre-planning will provide an opportunity and time to share the findings. I will continue to advocate for professional development for general and special education teachers who teach in inclusion environments through local education boards and state agencies.

Potential Impact on Social Change

The potential impact on social change resulting from this study has implications at the local level and for any teacher or school district that is responsible for implementing effective inclusion programs. Professional development is an integral element that is recognized as a best practice for inclusion. As previously referenced, professional development is a comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teachers' effectiveness in raising student achievement (Hirsh, 2009). Professional development is a way for teachers to enhance their knowledge base of particular instructional and developmental strategies to employ with students (Mertens, Flowers, & Caskey, 2009). That being the case, general and special education teachers that work in inclusive environments can rely on specific professional development to help them become equipped to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the general education environment. Professional development has been found to improve teaching knowledge

and skill which results in an increased efficacy for teachers and students present in the inclusive setting. Thus, if more general and special education teachers are exposed to beneficial professional development chances are good that the academic achievement of their students will improve. Ultimately, the life outcomes for these students may improve as a long term results related to beneficial professional development for general and special education teachers.

Reflections

Reflecting on the research process is an important step. When reviewing how the study was conducted, researchers should consider their personal biases, perceptions, and any effects they may have had on the participants. I found that I had the chance to explore my motivations for conducting this study in relation to personal biases and preconceived ideas about the research process. As a general education teacher, I was motivated to conduct this study because I was aware of the challenges that teachers face when teaching in inclusion and how teachers are expected to prepare students to perform well on state assessments. Inclusion has been an issue for many years, which is what inspired me to conduct research with the ends of supporting general education teachers. The primary instrument for data collection was the interview. Therefore, I tried to establish a rapport with each participant and encourage openness by ensuring complete anonymity. I also attempted to avoid imposing any personal biases. During the data collection process, I was concerned about my facial expressions and gestures when the special education teachers were responding to interview questions. Because of this, I paid close attention so that my nonverbal movements would not influence the responses of the participants.

The interview process was very smooth. I was very apprehensive prior to the interviews taking place. I was worried that many teachers would not attend at their selected time because many participants wanted to meet on the same day. However, I was patient and accommodated their schedules to ensure that all of the interviews were able to take place. The participants appeared to be very open to sharing their feelings on professional development for inclusion and teaching in inclusive environments. Their openness and honesty about their needs, abilities and hopes for inclusion in their school was very inspiring to hear. I found the interviews process very uplifting.

While conducting this study, my feelings about the research process have changed. As a researcher, I learned that preconceived thoughts and personal biases should be addressed prior to the study. I also learned that data analysis for qualitative research is very complex and rigorous. Yet, I looked forward to compiling the information together to get the results. Lastly, I learned throughout the research process that schedules often have to be adjusted and that flexibility is a requirement when multiple parties are involved. Overall, the research process became a thought provoking journey that taught transformed my ideas and approaches as a researcher.

Conclusion

The findings reported from this study and the literature reviewed highly suggested that all general and special education teachers receive professional development necessary for inclusion. The perceptions of 10 general and special education teachers who teach in inclusion settings were shared. Their perceptions were based on their overall experiences. These perceptions were analyzed from a case study perspective and compared with studies and expert opinions in the related literature.

Education background and proper professional development specific for teaching in inclusion played an essential role in the perceptions of the general and special education teachers. Conceptually, teachers' attitudes play a significant part in the success of implementing inclusion in schools. Teachers who are inadequately trained are likely to have less success in inclusionary classroom environments. There are also negative effects on the teachers' instructional abilities and skills for working with students with various disabilities in the inclusive classroom. Findings suggested further need to examine the types professional development for new general education teachers who have students with disabilities in their classes. There needs to be further understanding of how administrators view new teachers' professional development needs for teaching in inclusion.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

What types of professional development do general and special education teachers find beneficial when teaching in inclusive environments?	
1. What are the professional development needs identified by general education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?	
2. What kinds of support do you think you may need to successfully teach in an inclusive classroom?	
3. How much professional development have you engaged in related to teaching in inclusive environments?	
4. What types of professional development are needed for special education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?	
What are the professional development needs identified by special education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?	
5. How might professional development be used to improve the current inclusion programs?	
6. What type of professional development or training did you receive prior to teaching in an inclusive classroom?	
7. Does your district provide training to assist teachers in working with special needs students in general education classrooms? If so, please describe the types of training you have received.	

What are the professional development needs identified by special education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms?	
8. Have you attempted to increase your knowledge of teaching students with disabilities independently? Please explain.	
9. What are successful methods or activities currently being used in your inclusive classroom?	
10. What suggestions do you have to make the inclusive classroom more successful for both the teachers and the students?	
How might professional development be used to improve the current inclusion programs?	
11. What types of professional development or training have you attended with both general education and special education teachers?	
12. How has the professional development that you have been a part of affected the strategies you use in the inclusive classroom?	
13. What suggestions do you have for improving professional development in the future?	
14. Do you have anything you would like to add?	

Demographic Questions

How many years of experience do you have as a teacher?

How many years have you worked in an inclusive environment?

What is your current position?

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

My name is [redacted] and I am a teacher in a large district in the Southern Region of the United States. I am a doctoral student at Walden University and I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

My research study is titled Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development Beneficial for Teaching in Inclusive Environments. I will conduct the investigation through one-on-one interviews. The interviews will last forty-five minutes to an hour. I hope to determine the most effective types of staff development in the area of inclusive education in order to increase and sustain general and special education teachers' effectiveness in the inclusive classroom setting.

If you would like more information about participating in this study, please email me via the address below. Before you agree to take part in this process, I will need to gather written consent. This form will contain an explanation of your rights as a participant in the study. The Consent Form will also describe the protocol and procedures during the one- on-one interviews, the role of the researcher, and the goal of the study. After this step, I will meet with you to fully explain the study. Once this step is completed, I will be contacting you with more information about the one-on-one interview process. Please feel free to email me or call me with any questions you may have. My contact information is listed at the close of this document. Finally, please understand that your participation in this study will be strictly confidential and I will assign you a pseudonym in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The school district will not receive, nor will they ask, for any information that will disclose the identity of any participant.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

[redacted]

August 26, 2016

Dear [redacted],

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development Beneficial for Inclusion* within the [redacted]. As part of this study, I authorize you to recruit participants, engage in data collection, member checking, and results dissemination activities. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: the involvement of personnel and a classroom or auxiliary room, and that the partner will provide the space. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).